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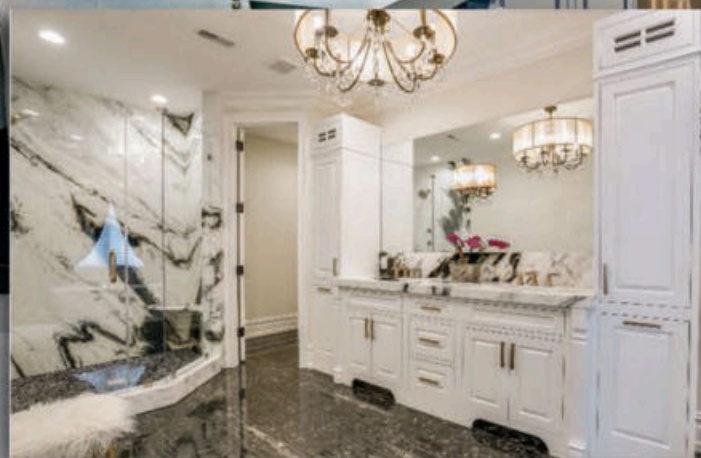
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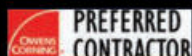
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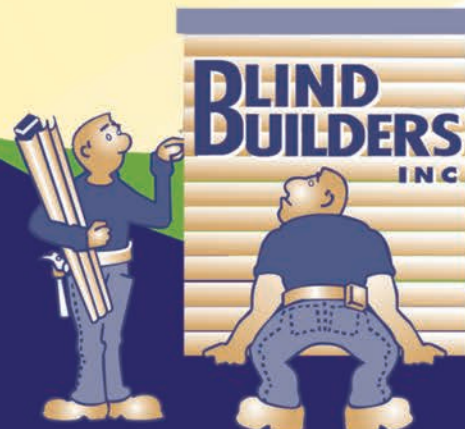
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contents

- 12 Your Great Outdoors**
With temperatures rising, residents are looking to create deeply personalized entertainment spaces and luxurious retreats right in their own backyards
- 18 Present and Future Pools**
Don't delay on polishing up your current pool or planning for a new one
- 23 Spring Showcase Special Advertising Section**
- 25 Ask the Expert**
Gehman Design Remodeling
- 27 Family in Business Spotlight**
➔ M.C. Weeks, Inc.
- 32 Time for Action**
Homeowners may want to consider updating or replacing their damaged and worn-out hardscaping features
- 37 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

On the cover:

A well-designed deck can take your outdoor living experience to the next level. With renowned experience in the Delaware Valley, Amazing Decks in Ambler, Pa., and Flemington, N.J., can build a deck beyond your wildest imagination to include outdoor kitchens, spas, fireplaces and so much more. To find out how they can build the perfect deck for you, turn to page 37.
Cover image courtesy of Amazing Decks



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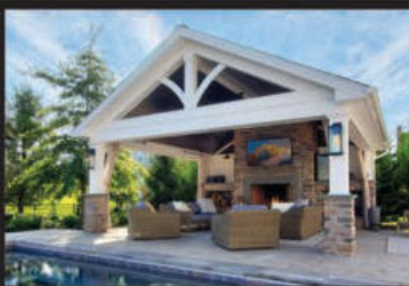



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Beautiful Inside and Out

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 31st 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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YOUR GREAT OUTDOORS

With temperatures and vaccination rates rising, residents are looking to create deeply personalized

**entertainment spaces
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right in their own backyards.

BY MADELEINE MACCAR

With the weather getting warmer and vaccines making many more comfortable with gatherings, thoughts are naturally turning to outdoor living spaces.

Some are planning to host enough summer barbecues to make up for last year's lost time while others want to create an idyllic outdoor living space. Some have responded to more than a year at home zeroing in on what to change inside and out, while others are making their backyards cozier, more inviting retreats.

No matter what, experts agree that the pandemic is driving decisions about outdoor spaces this year. The variables come from how that manifests itself per homeowners' tastes, feelings, income or savings, family situations and more.

Whether you're just updating your patio's color scheme or finally decided it's time for that backyard revamp you've been toying with for years, experts are here to help create your outdoor eden.

Be Aware of Shortages

Before you begin, whether you're buying, building or breaking ground, know that you may encounter the material shortages plaguing property owners and municipalities alike throughout the pandemic. Even if one supplier has ample in-house supply,

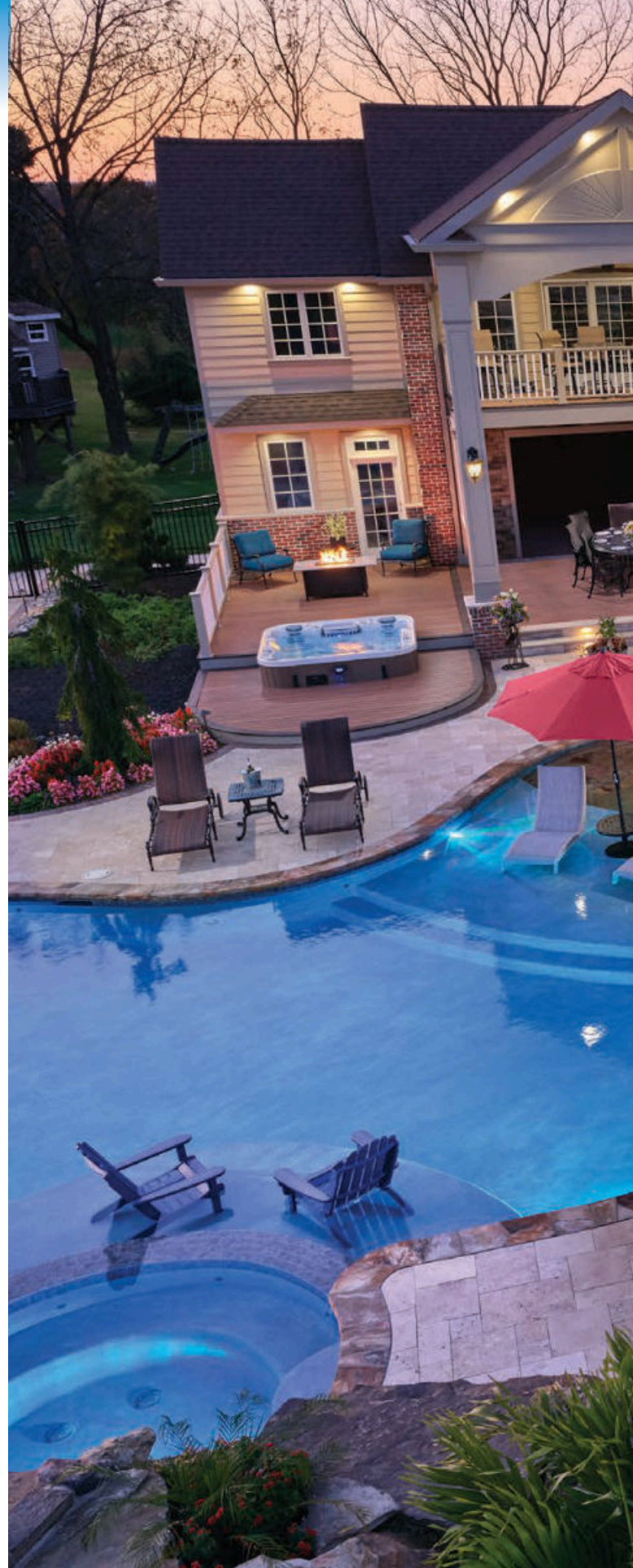


Image courtesy of Sequoia Out Back



“

The pandemic has had a huge effect on the creation of idyllic, multifunctional backyard escapes.”

YOUR GREAT OUTDOORS

special orders and third-party partners might create delays.

John Keller, whose Sequoia Out Back offers a range of customized outdoor options from deck construction to railing to hard-scaping design to furniture, has the advantage of seeing trends from an array of angles. Getting ahead of shortages helped Sequoia's Hatfield, Pennsylvania, location and showroom stay well stocked, but customers should be aware that any seemingly infinite demand eventually has an impact. And the past few months have been filled with projects.

Keller advises homeowners that "time is of the essence" if they're looking to complete projects in 2021.

"We specialize in the outdoor living area as a whole and the challenge has been getting those products," he says. "We currently have a lot of inventory because of our place in the market, but the demand is so high that it could run out."

Those who want a project completed within a certain time frame might have to rely on what's in stock now rather than a special order that would delay a summer project potentially until the fall.

"People have been taking what we have because the lead times for special orders have been so long," he says.

The Comfort of the Indoors Outside

More than one unified trend, people are looking for ways to extend their indoor living space outdoors.

"One of the new things people are really focusing on is comfort, especially since technology has made outdoor furniture and especially cushions more comfortable," says



Bobby Huber of Oskar Huber Furniture & Design. "Some outdoor furniture used to look pretty but it wasn't always the most comfortable: Now, they can get the best of both worlds. People want a more luxurious experience, like creating a second living room or dining room, but outside."

Huber, representing the fourth generation of the Oskar Huber family, jokes that he's been in the industry his entire life. But it's given him perspective on how industry trends are influenced by outside factors.

Huber and Keller agree that the pandemic has a huge effect on the creation of idyllic, multifunctional backyard escapes while keeping in mind that not everyone is comfortable with indoor gatherings yet. And you need a solid foundation for an outdoor enclave, though, which is where many projects start.

"We're seeing a ton of

decking projects because of how COVID has affected outdoor living," Keller affirms. "We have a lot of different products from a lot of different manufacturers for a lot of different budgets because it all comes down to what each customer wants."

Huber also sees that current outdoor design as driven largely by individual tastes.

"It's an outdoor living space with lighting, area rugs for the outdoors, outside pillows, you can really add all the 'jewelry' and nice accents you want," he says.

Durable Doesn't Mean Drab

Gone are the days of uninspired outdoor accessories that don't look like much but can withstand the elements or are more ornamental than functional. Durable furniture, building materials and decorations have benefited from modern materials, aesthetics and expectations giving sturdy items a much-needed makeover.

Since some outdoor overhauls aren't on a permanent residence but rather a second property, it's important to consider how extreme weather or salty sea air can affect the looks and lifespan of outdoor furniture, fixtures and features.

There are different grades for outdoor



Image above courtesy of Oskar Huber Furniture & Design. Image at left courtesy of Sequoia Out Back

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offerings, so it's important to ask about and really understand what you're purchasing as you consider up-front price and expected longevity.

Two materials Huber highly praises are the recycled polywood as well as the "marine-grade polymer" and coated aluminum frames of a line called Telescope, especially for those outfitting their Shore houses for year-round outdoor furniture. He also says teak is a "really beautiful option that's been around for ages," but it does require some maintenance—unless a gradually graying patina is what you want, and plenty do.

Your Dream, Expert Guidance

Huber says experts will visit a customer's home for a complimentary on-site consultation and in-person assessment, offering as much or as little input as the client wants.

"One of the things our designers do is ask the right questions to try and figure out how the customer will be using the space: How do they want to live outside, are they going to be doing a lot of dining, do they want a big outdoor kitchen, do they need outdoor seating," Huber explains. "We let them be in the driver's seat but we'll assist in any way we can. You want to get a vibe from them, and then show them the different things they might like."

Expert advice also helps ensure a homeowner completely understands the product they're incorporating into their backyard space, as well as how to work with their budget. Having a professional eye on a living space also minimizes the possi-

bility of ill-fitting purchases, either physically or aesthetically.

"If you buy something and it's not right, that's kind of an expensive mistake," Huber says. "A lot of times, people—myself included—have difficulty designing a room for things like the layout, the spacing, the traffic flow and pattern."

People may have an idea but not a complete vision of what they want, and Keller says both professional guidance and visiting showrooms to interact with products firsthand can help ensure these big decisions don't become bigger mistakes.

"People don't necessarily know exactly what they want until they come into our 40,000-square-foot showroom, which is why the showroom is such a big benefit. You can see the building materials and the furniture itself," says Keller. "We know our products, and we can help people make the best decision for their needs." **H&H**



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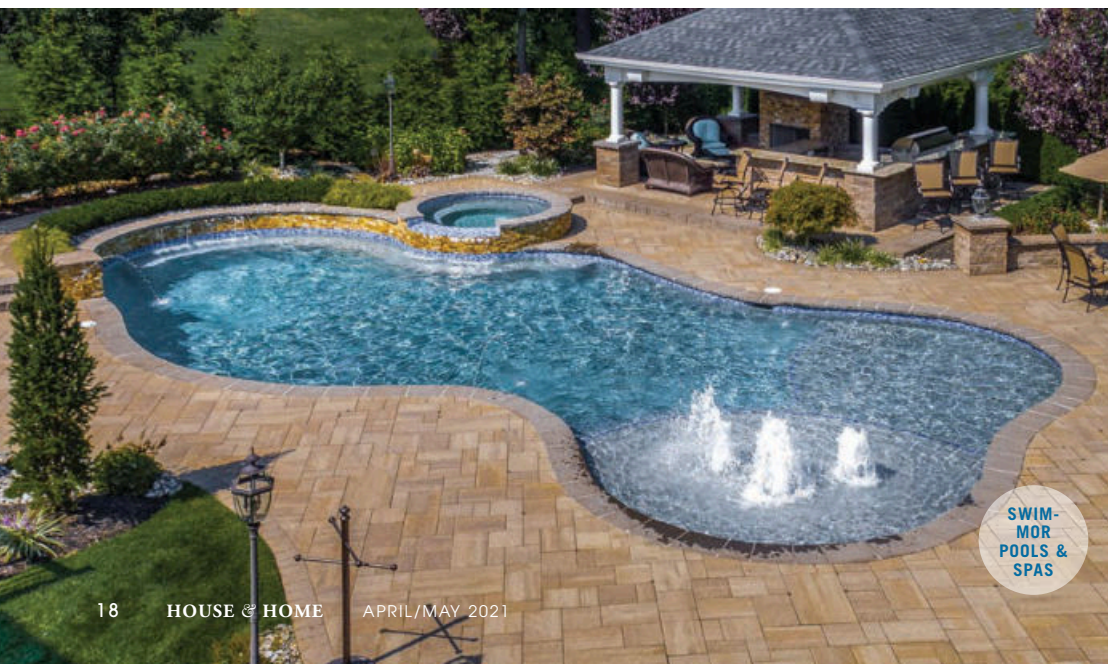


by Liz Hunter



Present and Future POOLS

Don't delay
on polishing up
your current
pool or planning
for a new
one.



There's nothing like having your own backyard pool. No swim club crowds to fight, no rule banning floats and you can swim day or night. And after a year of a global pandemic, the demand for pools has never been higher as people want a resort experience in their own yard. According to *Realtor Magazine*, there was a 21% uptick in new in-ground residential pools compared to 2019.

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However, that demand comes with a waiting list and possible material shortages. To put it bluntly, a new pool for 2021 likely isn't going to happen for those who want it. But there's always 2022, say pool pros.

"Honestly, having a pool installed for this summer is pretty much out of the question," says Mike McCool of Swim-Mor Pools & Spas. "Because of the boom in pool sales and the problems with the supply chain of a variety of materials, building a pool for swimming this summer is probably not in the cards. Homeowners shopping now have come to that realization and understand that they are now planning for 2022. This is important to know, as you do not want to decide to wait until the fall to plan for next year as we fully intend for this trend to continue. Pool companies are already booking for spring 2022 starts so you do not want to wait too long."

We asked experts in the industry for their advice on servicing and upgrades on current pools, as well as what decisions homeowners would have to make during the new pool planning process.

Current Pools

As you get ready for this summer, experts advise on features to consider adding and maintenance that shouldn't be ignored.

The most commonly requested or required repairs

include structural cracks, broken tiles, pool coping and plumbing equipment, says Dominic DiCesare, general manager of Blue Haven Pools & Spas. "Your pool is like any other home repair, a small issue will just continue to turn into a major one if left unresolved."

Essential equipment such as bottom drains should be replaced every seven years and be firmly secured with the proper screws and lids to avoid risk of entrapment. Newer laws also call for drains to have three feet of separation, which should be checked by a professional. Heaters may also need to be replaced every 10 years.

Upgrades can bring a new look and feel to your existing pool, and make it run more efficiently. "Variable speed pumps are being used rather than having a one-speed pump," says John Pezzetta of Pezzetta Pools & Patios. "It is easier to control and saves on electricity and energy." If run at a lower RPM for a longer period of time each day, these pumps contribute to clearer, more chemically balanced water.

Salt systems reduce the need for added chemicals and can be added to existing pools. Salt-water prevents pool water from turning green and leaves skin smoother without that chlorine feel.

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Homeowners may even consider transforming the surrounding landscape of their pool to really bring their backyard oasis to life. Something even as simple as a fire pit with benches can make your pool area more inviting.

SmartFilter with Microban. “This filter is coated with Microban to resist mold, mildew and bacteria. Even when your pool is not running, there’s no chance for bacteria to grow,” DiCesare says.

You can still bring some fun features to your pool this season. “Depending on the type of pool will

determine what homeowners are able to do with regard to enhancing an existing pool on a renovation,” says McCool. “With gunite pools, a wide variety of features can be added as part of the renovation. Outside of simply upgrading to the more decorative materials and finishes being used today, some of

the most popular features added on a renovation are a spa, sun shelf or tanning ledge, raised walls, water features or rock waterfalls. Each are features that are commonplace on today’s pools but were not popular 20-plus years ago.”

Homeowners may even consider transforming the surrounding

landscape of their pool to really bring their backyard oasis to life. Something even as simple as a fire pit with benches can make your pool area more inviting.

Next Year’s Pool

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your 2022 pool now will pay off in the long run.

DiCesare says there are quite a few compliance-related hoops to get through first—township requirements, engineering, setback distance codes, to name a few. “We first need to come out and look at your property,” he says. “Some townships have more rules than others, but we always want to complete a topographical survey and check out stormwater management to make sure there are no issues. A new pool can’t just be planned and done in a month if done the right way. It can be a drawn-out process.”

Townships may also be backlogged due to the pandemic, so the sooner your plans are submitted, the more time cushion you have.

As you interview pool contractors, find out their areas of expertise. For instance, Blue Haven works exclusively with concrete (gunitite) pools. “Our focus is on in-ground, custom gunite pools because they are a permanent structure,” he says. “Over the years, ren-

ovations can be made to these pools to update the look or features or make it look brand-new. It’s more valuable for homeowners to invest in this type of pool.”

Fiberglass pools are another option and many prefer to work with these, such as Chuck Ordini of Ordini’s Best Fiberglass Pools. He says, “Fiberglass is the best product pool-wise on the market starting with the lifetime warranty and the very low maintenance involved. It’s a no-brainer—you will never refinish a fiberglass pool like a concrete pool or change a liner in a vinyl pool. Vinyl replacement is \$6,000-8,000 and resurfacing a gunite pool is \$15,000-25,000.”

Ordini’s is known for its one-day installation of fiberglass pools, although it is booked out until spring 2022. As a Latham Grand dealer, these pools are available in over 70 shapes and sizes and 12 colors.

“Freeform pools are a new trend as far as shapes are concerned,” adds Pezzetta. “Very few

people are asking for the traditional rectangles or squares.”

Knowing which company will get you what works right for you is important. Check the Better Business Bureau for ratings and reviews, and nothing beats word of mouth.

“It is important that the builder shows up on time, and is consistent,” says Pezzetta. “Check their reputation with past customers and make sure that they have references. Look at jobs they have done to make sure that they have experience, high-quality workmanship and take pride in what they do. Also look for someone who has been building pools for a minimum of 15 to 20 years.”

“You want to make sure you’re dealing with a professional company, and if it’s a right fit for you because it is major construction and you have to live with the outcome of the job,” says DiCesare. “You have a lot of small builders and landscapers that start pool projects that go upside-down real quick.” **H&H**



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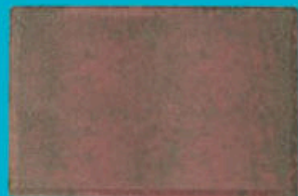
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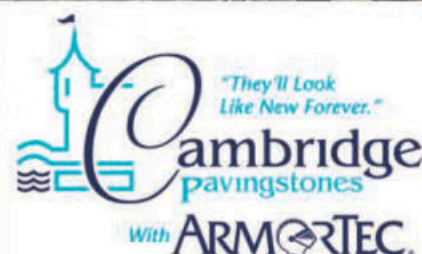
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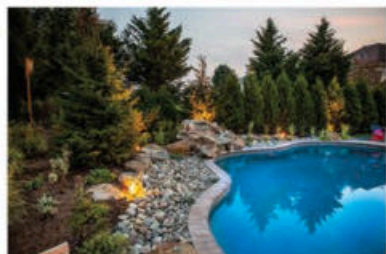


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ask the expert
by Lindsey Getz

Gehman Design Remodeling

WITH MORE PEOPLE STAYING HOME THAN EVER BEFORE, MANY ARE LOOKING AT RENOVATIONS THAT WILL MAKE THEIR SPACE MORE ENJOYABLE. When it comes to bathrooms, particularly the master bath, homeowners are interested in creating a spa retreat where they can truly relax.

It's a trend that Dennis Gehman, MCR, of Gehman Design Remodeling, says he's seeing more and more. People might not be traveling as much—and may even be working from home—so they want to make their personal spaces into a safe, comfortable escape.

Of course, when partnering with a qualified vendor to complete any renovation project, homeowners have numerous options from which to choose. But when it comes to something as important as a place to relax—something we all need more than ever—you want to be sure that it's done right. No one wants any more hassles and headaches than they need, which is why choosing a design/build firm that can handle every aspect of the project—from design to construction—is essential.

House & Home spoke with Gehman about the ways homeowners can transform their bathroom into a spa-like retreat.



Dennis Gehman,
President

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF A LUXURY BATHROOM?

Some homeowners might be accustomed to traveling and visiting resorts where they'd have some of these spa amenities and now they're asking how they can have them

at home. Along with the idea of a spa at home has come a shift back to large tubs—something that homeowners had been trending away from for a while. Previously, people might have said they didn't have time to relax in a bath, but now they're making the

time. A soaking tub can be an excellent way to de-stress, and we're getting more requests for them.

Of course, large showers remain popular, too. A lot of homeowners want both options. Homeowners love the ability to have multiple spray features, including a regular showerhead and a handheld, as well as a rain shower. Those amenities help to make the shower feel like a spa experience, too.

ARE THERE STRESS-RELIEVING FEATURES TO CONSIDER?

Some homeowners truly want to go the extra mile in creating that luxury spa experience with a steam shower. The warm, vaporous steam is good for the skin and the sinuses.

Other homeowners prefer the idea of adding a sauna, which uses dry heat. A sauna may help to produce “a good sweat” and therefore flush toxins from their body. Proponents of this feature suggest it's another great way to release stress.

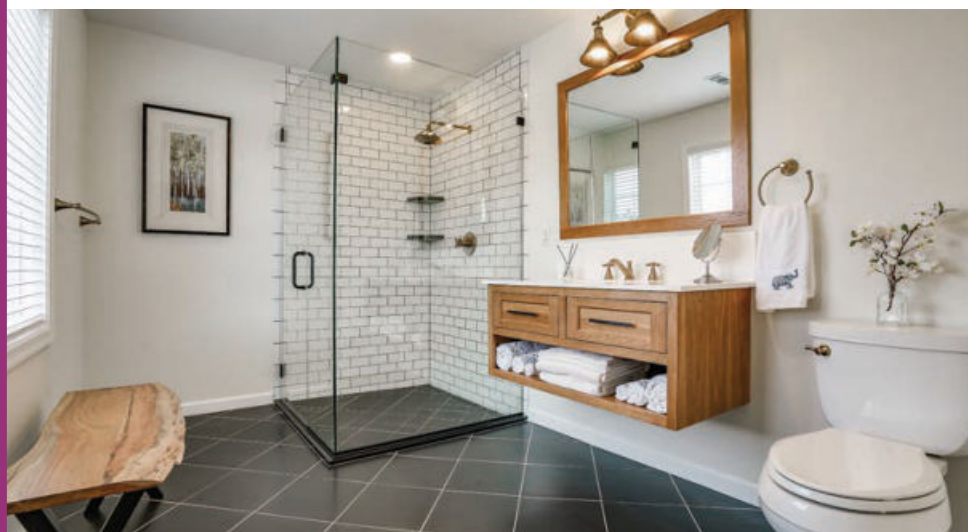
WHAT ARE OTHER DETAILS THAT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN ENJOYING THE SPACE?

In terms of bathroom flooring, tile still reigns, but many homeowners are adding heated tile for a more luxuriant feel. The heated floors can be put on a wall timer so that by the time you step out of the shower or tub, the floor is sufficiently heated. Homeowners can even add towel warmers for that spa-like feel. Also, if you add steam features, no-fog mirrors are a must. Options include those that are insulated or use heat to prevent steam-up.

Homeowners may also want a lighted medicine cabinet. They have ones which open up and there are also mirrors and lights inside, so you can create a whole tri-view mirror setup, almost like a dressing room. Some homeowners add Bluetooth speakers to their bathroom so they can connect to Spotify or another streaming service. In fact, Kohler makes a showerhead with built-in Bluetooth speakers.

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We have a proven track record and a long list of happy clients. We were recently awarded two Region 1 - Contractor of the Year (CotY) Awards from the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, also known as NARI—one for a spa master bath, and another for an entire second-floor residential interior, including three bathrooms. In the end, choosing the right partner can be the difference between having a gorgeous space with all of the amenities where you can truly relax, versus a compromised space that suffers because it wasn't designed or built correctly in the first place. After all, it does no good to invest significant time and money to create a sanctuary designed to help you unwind and de-stress, only to be left wondering: If only I could go back in time and do things differently. **H&H**



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In 2002, M.C. Weeks, Inc. opened the first Hunter Douglas Gallery showroom in Pennsylvania and the 100th in the country, earning the right to develop innovative products and offer new upgrades and promotions. Its staff is the best trained in the area for providing Powerview motorization products and mobile control systems.

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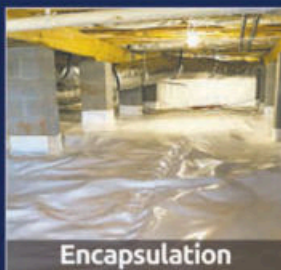
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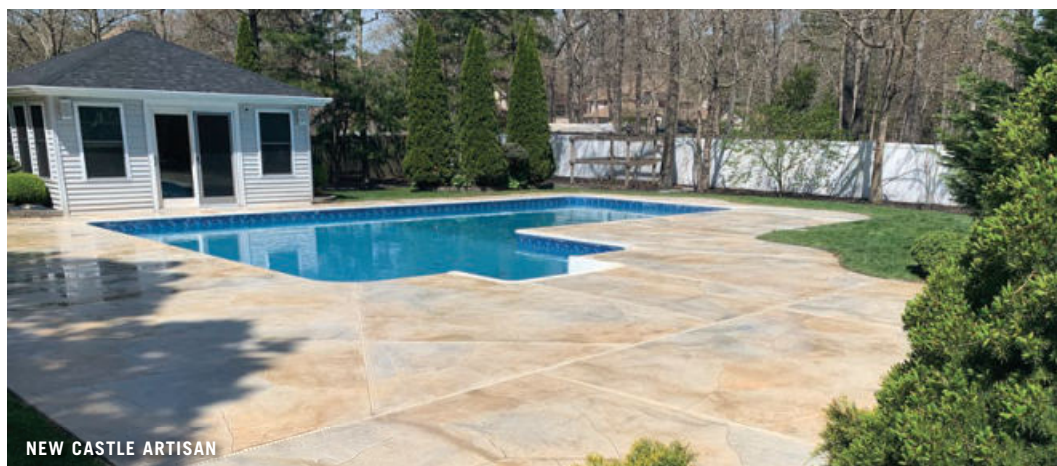
With outdoor entertaining upon us, homeowners may want to consider updating or replacing their damaged and worn-out hardscaping features.

TIME FOR ACTION

by Matt Cosentino

Although restaurants and bars are starting to operate at full capacity, amusement parks are reopening and people will be longing to take the vacations they missed out on last year, there is no question that outdoor living spaces will continue to play a crucial role in entertainment for homeowners this summer. From beautiful stone walkways that greet guests at the front of the house, to custom patios that host barbecues and parties, to pool decks that often become the focal point of a backyard, the right hardscaping feature can enhance those get-togethers and make an ordinary property extraordinary.

However, over the years these surfaces withstand a great deal of wear and tear not only from usage, but the elements and changing of the seasons. Now is an ideal time to examine the hardscaping around the home and determine if repair work or even replacement



is necessary heading into the warmer months.

“Usually in the spring everyone goes out to start unveiling their yard and assessing what needs to be done for the rebirth of summer,” says Gwen Kunkel of New Castle Artisan, which specializes in concrete resurfacing for outdoor spaces. “They do landscaping, mulching and cleanup, and then they take a look at their concrete. A lot of times after winter has come through there has been additional damage or just a tired-looking surface outside. We get very busy because of that.”

Whether homeowners are looking to begin a brand-new hardscaping project or give a

makeover to an existing one, our area is blessed with a plethora of qualified professionals. *House & Home* spoke to several of them to learn more about the options and important factors to consider.

SOLVING COMMON PROBLEMS

In some cases it is obvious that work must be done to a hardscaping feature, such as a sidewalk or walkway that has sunken and created a tripping hazard. But there are other more subtle signs to look for as well.

“You would see some cracking; that would be a symptom of a sinking slab,” says Margaret Mustin of BQ Base-

ments & Concrete. “You might see some water pooling, or worse, water going into the basement if [the hardscaping is] up against the house. If it’s a front stoop—we do a lot of those—you can see that the step is now too big, hence another tripping hazard though not as obvious as the sidewalk. Or if it’s up against the house, you can see the line starting to appear from where the concrete is sinking.”

BQ Basements & Concrete uses a system called PolyLevel to address issues of sunken or uneven concrete. Polyurethane foam is inserted into a dime-sized hole and turns from a liquid into a solid, filling the void between the eroded soil and the concrete slab,



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stabilizing it and creating a flat, even surface on top. According to Mustin, the process can take as little as 20 minutes in some instances.

"It's a permanent solution, it's clean and people just love it," she says. "There's a 10-year warranty, it's environmentally friendly and you can drive a tractor trailer over it in 15 minutes. You also won't have mismatched concrete from replacing certain sections."

People also appreciate this solution because it won't break the bank, Mustin adds. "What a lot of homeowners don't know is that they don't have to replace [the slab] if it's in decent shape. We can just come and pump the foam, even it and fix the problem, which is something you can't see. It's happening underneath due to erosion or bad backfill."

New Castle Artisan also avoids replacement by using polymer concrete densifier to fix problems like cracking or pitting. The densifier is designed to absorb into the clean pores of the cement and harden, Kunkel explains, and if applied properly it will not delaminate, peel or flake. The resulting surface is not only durable, but New Castle creates an aesthetically pleasing design—such as the always-popular irregular stone pattern—to camouflage the existing cracks and add curb appeal.

"It's basically turning the repair into a remodel so you end up with value out of it as opposed to just fixing something," Kunkel says. "If you have a concrete driveway and you have a crack, and then you replace the concrete driveway you really haven't added any value to the home. But if you are able to fix that driveway and give it an updated look, then the money you are spending becomes valuable as an asset and upgrade to the property."

Not only is polymer concrete densifier beneficial for driveways and patios, but it can also be used in the area around a swimming pool.

"It's an exceptional application for pool decks for several reasons, the first one being concrete around a pool is extremely expensive to replace," Kunkel says. "It's very labor-intensive bringing concrete into someone's backyard. Our process does not damage the landscaping and there are no fences to take down. It's done with handheld tools, so there's not a lot of rip-out and mess-up."

"Finally, the application and the way it's colored and designed allows for future reparability. So if you have to get your skimmer replaced or your ladder steps replaced and they have to take out a piece of the concrete, this is something I can match up should that need arise. As I explain to people, it's a repair process that can always be spot repaired."

Yet another option is to use an epoxy-based coating system to prevent damage and extend the life of sidewalks or patios. Not only are these products

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durable and safe, they also can add aesthetic value.

"We have seven different products [that can be helpful], depending on whether you just want the finished concrete to look nice, you have medium damage like small chips or flakes, or you have major damage like big cracks," says Jason Larsen of Epoxy Floor Experts. "We pretty much have solutions for everything."

Larsen recommends a product called FlexStone for pool decks for a number of reasons, safety being at the top of the list. "It's a rubber and stone mixture that goes on about a half-inch thick," he says. "The advantage is it's porous, so when a kid gets out of the pool, the water will seep down into the rubber so it's not sitting on the surface. That way you don't have puddles everywhere, making it slippery. It's also slip resistant on the top. But if you do happen to fall, you're falling on rubber rather than falling on concrete."

FlexStone is also cool on the feet—particularly in lighter colors—

and homeowners can include designs, such as a dolphin or lettering.

Larsen suggests using a quartz or flake coating for a patio that has cracks rather than tearing it up and starting over, especially since the thawing and freezing common in this area will continue to affect the concrete. There are endless options to choose from in terms of colors.

"If you're going to spend the money, you want to accent it and make it look nice," he says. "We have so many choices that there are no popular colors—it all comes down to your personality. We have a color for every personality, that's what I like to say. Some of our customers call it 'concrete candy' or 'concrete jewelry.'"

STARTING FRESH

Steve McNamara of Custom Patios also takes a lot of calls at this time of year for people hoping he can fix the problems with their hardscaping feature. Obviously, he does everything he can to help them avoid the cost and hassle of

a complete rebuild.

"Some people just can't afford to put a new patio in," he says. "Sometimes we're able to powerwash, remove all the old sand and put in a new polymer sand and give them a little uplift. But it's really a case-by-case basis whether the patio is salvageable or not. Quite often it needs to be redone completely."

For those who require a replacement, and also clients who are finally moving forward with their dream project and installing a brand-new hardscaping element, McNamara undergoes a comprehensive planning process before designing and finally building the space. Homeowners provide pictures for inspiration and he discusses cost along with the pros and cons of a wet-laid application versus a dry-laid application.

Many of the people McNamara

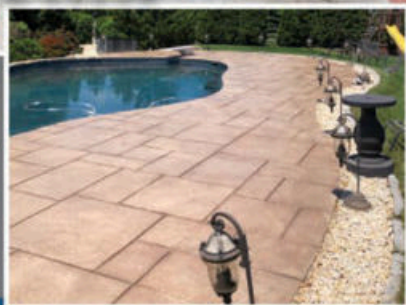
works with are drawn to the natural stone look, with Pennsylvania flagstone being the most commonly used.

"That's really popular," he says. "The benefits are, it's a timeless material for one—it never gets outdated. Some pavers are probably more appropriate for certain neighborhoods but for certain homes the flagstone fits the bill. We like to mix it up with brick and other materials. People like the



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natural cleft and the colors of it; you get various shades of blue, gray, some rust and lilac colors with it. With some pavers, depending on the company, some of the aggregate starts to show through over time. You don't get anything like that on the natural stone."

However, there are also many advantages to using pavers and plenty of manufacturers from which to choose. McNamara does not push any particular company on his customers, but simply presents the options and helps them make the best decision for their property and budget.

"There is a little bit more versatility with the pavers," he says. "Obviously, you have different shapes, sizes and a lot of different colors, and I think that's why a lot of people go with it. It's also a little more affordable to install."

"The manufacturing techniques have gotten better over the years. They have larger-format pavers now, which kind of mimic the size and scale of natural stone. But you're never going to get the

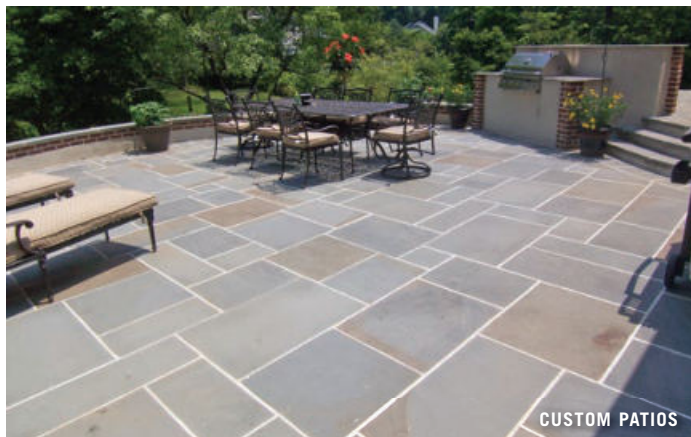
real look of natural stone unless you're using it."

Natural stone can also be used on a pool deck, with travertine being a trendy choice because it remains cooler than flagstone or pavers under the summer sun.

No matter which materials the homeowners choose for their project, McNamara is always delighted to deliver an outdoor space that will change the way they entertain.

"When we take before-and-

after pictures, people can't even believe how it turns out," he says. "You have to have a particular vision, I guess, and once you've done it for so long you end up getting pretty good at it when you design them all day long. I do have a design and architectural background so that helps. It's really nice to see people appreciate the work when it's all done. It transforms the whole property, and if it's designed properly it can really increase the value of the home." **H&H**



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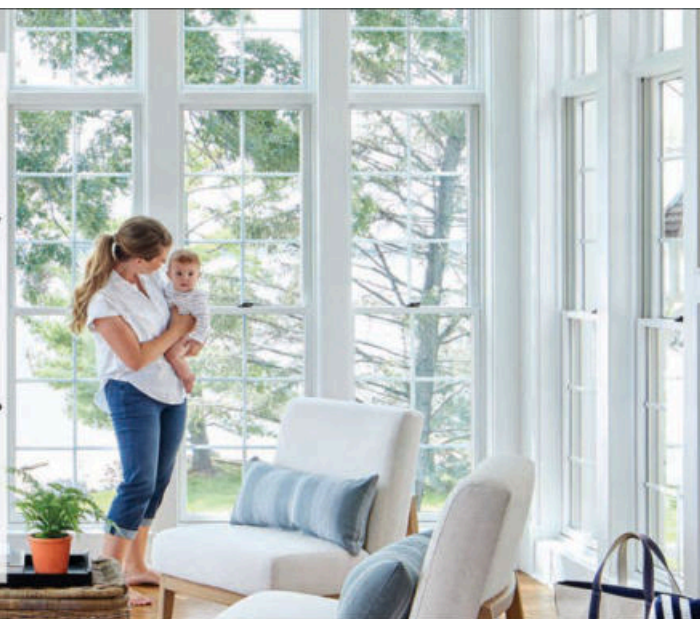
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Beautiful Inside and Out

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 31st 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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The National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) recently introduced Dennis D. Gehman, MCR, CKBR, CRPM, CLC, of Gehman Design Remodeling in Harleysville, Pennsylvania as the new NARI national president.

"The NARI national president is vital to ensuring that we continue to meet our members' needs, especially in the current economic climate," says David Pekel, CEO of NARI. "Dennis is a well-known and dynamic leader whose extensive experience in the remodeling industry makes him a perfect fit to help move our

association forward. We are grateful for not only his commitment but his dedication to professionalism, innovation and leadership."

According to Pekel, Gehman and all of the other new NARI officers have been involved with and invested in the ongoing success of NARI for many years. Their industry expertise, along with a deep familiarity for the organization's membership and mission, have allowed them to make significant and lasting contributions to the association.

Gehman says, "I am blessed to work in the remodeling industry where I enjoy going to work. We are in the people business, the service we provide happens to be remodeling. The work we do to our clients' houses improves their lives in many ways. With over 45 years of remodeling experience, I am honored and privileged to be able to give back to our industry to continue 'to advance and promote the remodeling industry's professionalism, product and vital public purpose.'"

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