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Volume 24, Issue 9



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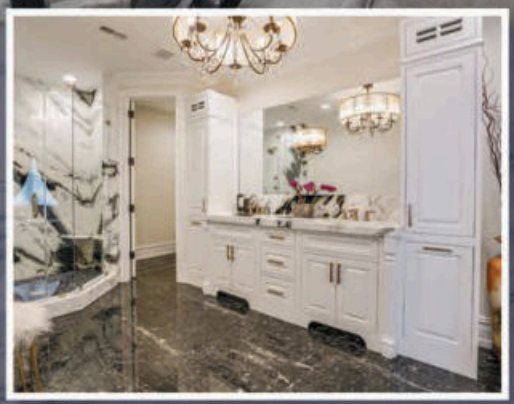
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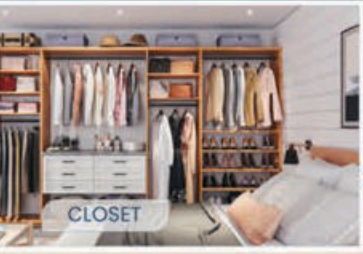
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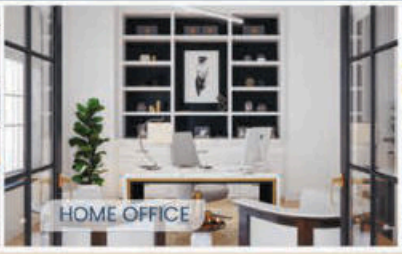
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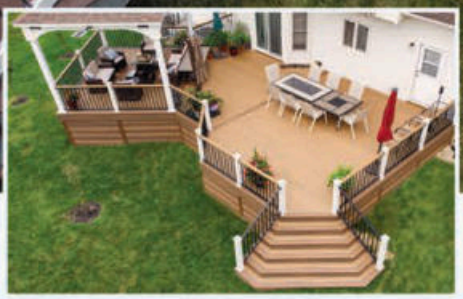
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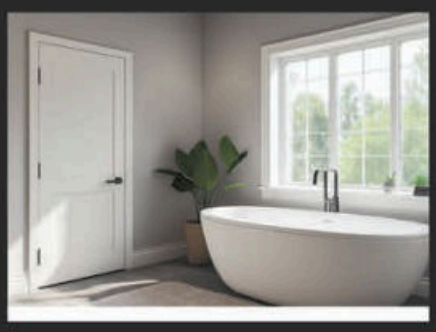
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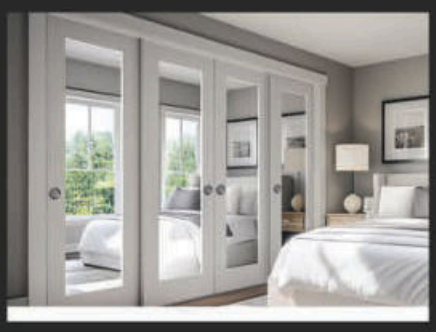
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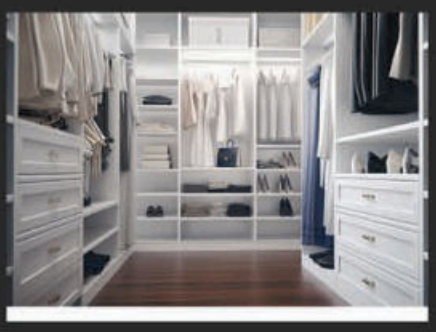
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National Sales Office:
HOUSE & HOME Magazine, LLC
700 E. Main St.
Norristown, PA 19401
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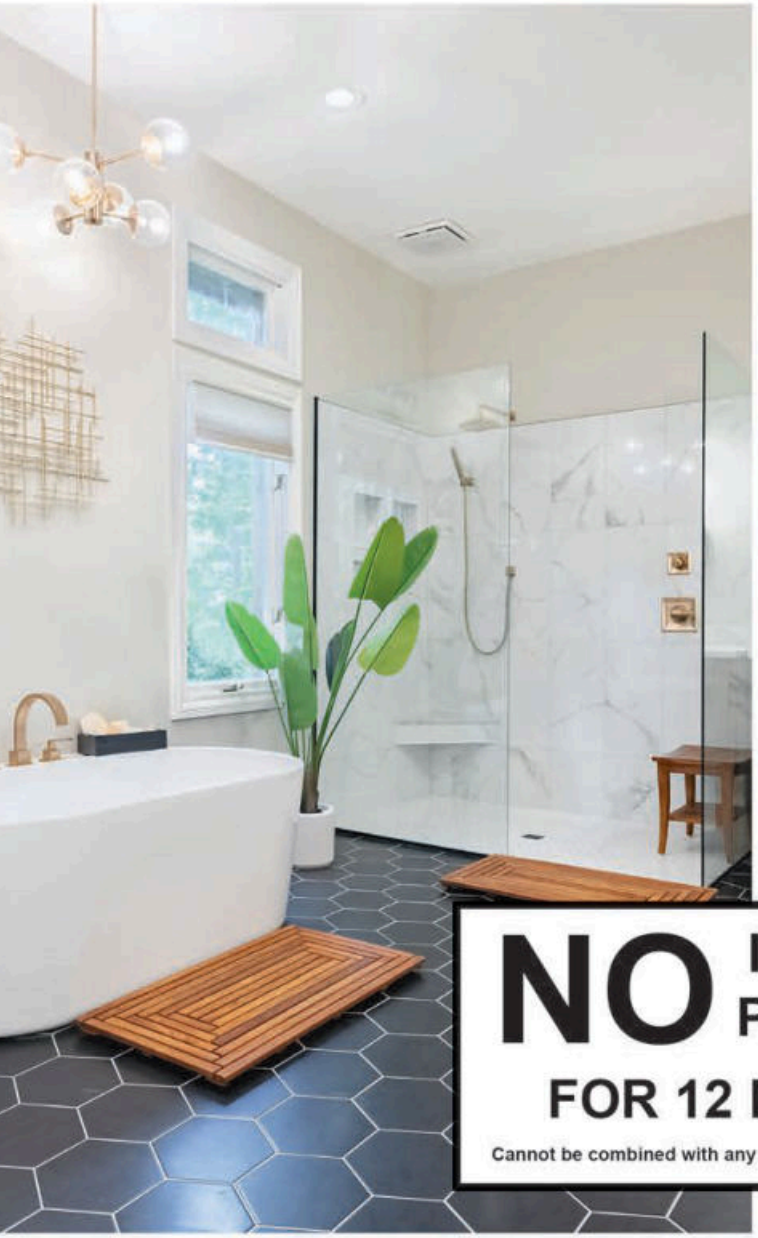
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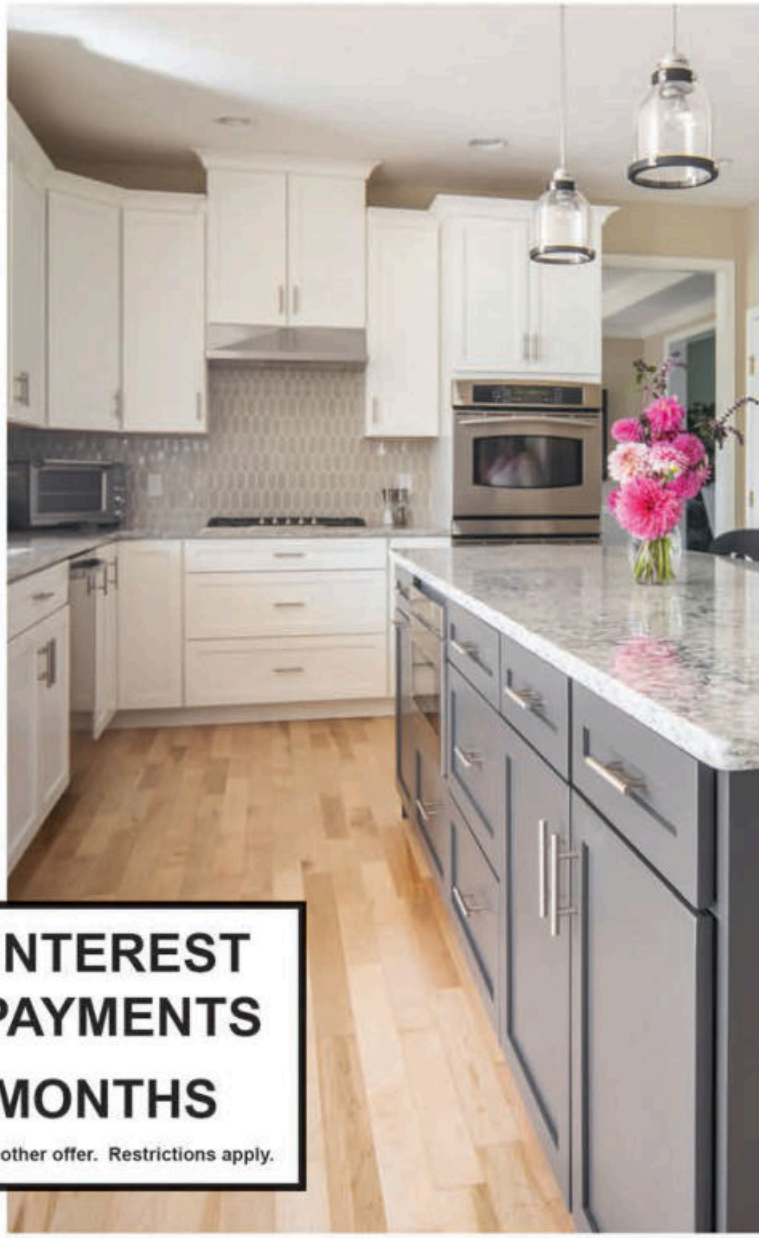
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CHIMNEY EXPERTS PUT SAFETY FIRST

D.J. Cross, Inc., Chim Chimney sets itself apart with top-notch, certified staff and an ability to tackle any job, big or small. *by* **Kristen Dowd**

There are a lot of things that set D.J. Cross, Inc., Chim Chimney apart from the competition. The Media-based company has the most certified technicians in the Philadelphia region, and owner Ben Cross would argue the family-owned business boasts the most qualified and experienced staff of any similar company in the entire country.

But he likes to think the true D.J. Cross difference is something a little more personal: his team's passion and attention to detail.

"What really sets us apart is our people," Ben says. "They truly are the experts."



Nearly a half century of service

In 1981, D.J. Cross was established by Dan and Jayne Cross, offering chimney maintenance and restoration services to Philadelphia, the Main Line and beyond. As the years passed by, the company grew to specialize in both residential and commercial services and master complicated jobs, all while hiring only the best.

Two years ago, Dan and Jayne welcomed retirement when their sons, Ben and Jon, bought the family business.

"It can be a challenge for any business to transition from first to second generation," explains Ben. But backed by their local upbringing—Ben and Jon are Malvern Prep graduates and both went to Temple University—and their 20 years of experience, D.J. Cross has thrived since the duo took the helm.

"We've more than doubled our staff in the last two years," he continues. "We've seen a lot of growth in the residential and commercial sectors of the business. We're working on a multiyear-long project at the University of Pennsylvania. It's exciting."

They have a new business, Cross Break Sheet Metal, that manufactures custom chimney products. Ben also recently launched a commercial scaffolding business, Cross Braced Scaffolding, to handle safe access needs in the chimney, masonry and roofing industries.

They also don't shy away from the more difficult projects: As members of the National Chimney Sweep Guild and with technicians certified by the Chimney Safety Institute of America, Fireplace Investigation Research and Education, National Fireplace Institute and National Air Duct Cleaners Association, they're prepared for any job.

"We are the go-to business for the jobs that no one else is capable of handling. We are really specialized in those tricky jobs. The ones that are super high. The ones that are super complicated. The ones people just don't have the wherewithal, capability or bandwidth to handle," Ben says. "We tend to be the company of choice for anything specialized."

Safety first

When D.J. Cross first started, it was imperative that safety came first in chimney maintenance, which remains a cornerstone of the company today.

"The easiest thing I explain to homeowners is it's a fire in your living room. We like to keep your fire in its place," Cross says. "We see a lot of chimneys and fireplaces that go years if not decades without any kind of regular maintenance. A lot can happen over the years."

If there are issues with a chimney that hasn't been inspected, a fire can easily get out of control. According to the National Fire Protection Association, inspections should be held annually. The inspection ensures that everything is in working order, as Ben notes that "chimneys and fireplaces often go overlooked or unthought of when it comes to home maintenance."

The time to schedule is now

With the fall season getting underway, customers should expect a one- to three-week lead time in terms of scheduling an inspection appointment. A D.J. Cross technician will come out to the home, perform the inspection and determine any next steps, if necessary.

"Everything starts with that inspection," Ben says, adding they will utilize cameras for internal inspections, visual checks for external inspections, and even drones. If a cleaning is needed, the process does not leave behind a dusty mess.

"We use vacuums, protect the area with drop cloths," he says. "We basically perform a dustless inspection and cleaning."

And if the job calls for something more involved than a cleaning—repairs, for instance—D.J. Cross will take care of that, too.

"We handle that, from soup to nuts. No two chimneys are built alike, so there are different remedies for each type of repair," Ben says.

In addition to wood-burning fireplaces and accompanying chimneys, D.J. Cross inspects and services venting systems for heaters and gas fireplaces.

"A lot of people think a gas fireplace doesn't need regular service," Ben says. "We have a whole team of gas specialists that are focused on gas fireplaces and regular maintenance."

And for those who think an inspection isn't necessary, Ben stresses there are a number of influential factors, not just the overall wear and buildup that may occur in a year. Home improvements—new exhaust fans in the kitchen, new flooring near the fireplace—can also impact a chimney, or birds may have nested in the structure. A switch from oil to gas heat would warrant an inspection, too.

"There are many reasons to do that annual inspection," Ben says. "We like to be preventative and proactive instead of reactive. H&H

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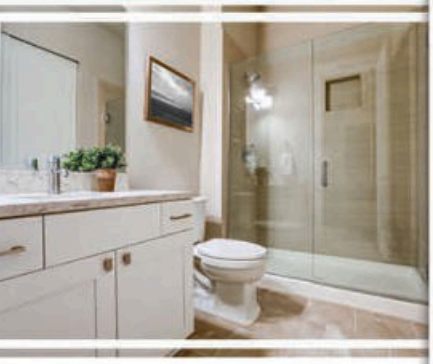
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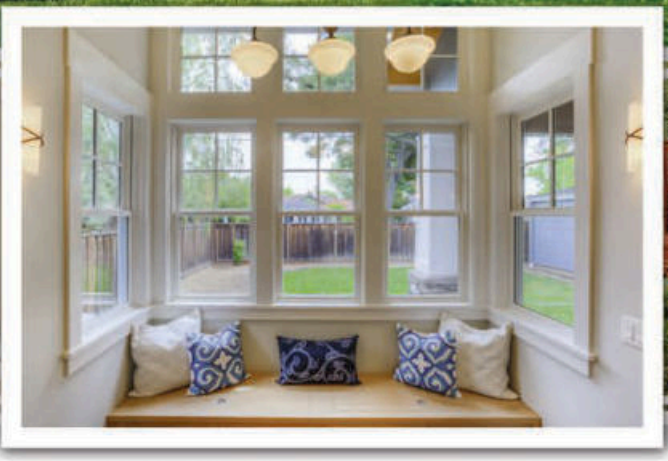
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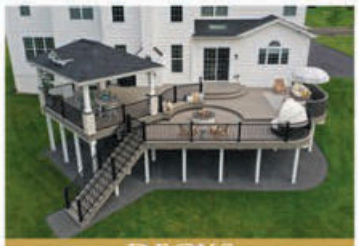
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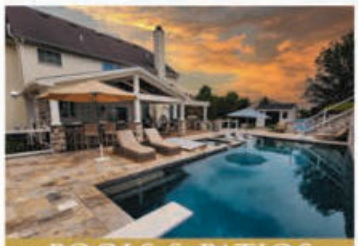


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Home is Where the "Hearth" is





Whether you're opting to stay warm with a **heating system or a fireplace** this winter, local professionals weigh in on the aspects to look for to ensure quality, safety and efficiency.

BY CARLY MURRAY

A home heating system is not typically at the forefront of peoples' minds, especially before the onset of winter. If there is any kind of problem with a heating system, it is usually only realized when it's turned on in the winter when heat circulation is most necessary. However, if a heating system has run its course or if a homeowner is just looking for a change, there **are plenty of different options** available that best suit the lifestyles within each household.

"Addressing your home through your insulation, your ventilation and mechanicals truly benefits everything that is essential to someone, and being able to be attentive to that with seasonal maintenance ensures the best quality of life for your loved ones and the essential belongings in your home," Allied Experts' Director Jose Diaz affirms.

The first step is to assess a home's heating system with the help of a professional to check if any regular maintenance is needed. These often-neglected checkups can save time and money before an easily-fixed issue turns into a bigger problem.

"The biggest thing is getting your maintenance, and tune-ups in general, done by a qualified professional, who will come out and change the filter, take a look at the heating system in general and make sure that it's working at peak efficiency for the next season," says Jeff Olewine, general manager of C&C Heating and Air Conditioning.

Olewine recommends having biannual inspections: one in spring and one in fall. Even getting started in August through September is better than nothing. Often a lack of general maintenance is the common culprit of issues with home heating systems.

"The most common issues revolve around the blower assembly in the furnace or a dirty air filter. Air filters are often forgotten about," says John Laphen, service manager with Doylestown Air.

Every circumstance is different, so having a professional check the system before it is fired up—especially after not

Home is Where the "Hearth" is

using it for several months—is always safest. A neglected heating system doesn't necessarily indicate danger, but it's always best to prepare for and to have a plan for the unexpected.

"The biggest [safety] concern would be being without heat during a cold snap. Another potential risk is the heat exchanger cracking, which can allow carbon monoxide to be released," Laphen continues.

An unexpected broken system—especially during the holidays when spending is maximized—may leave household occupants shivering in what is supposed to be the comfort of their homes until they can find the time availability and funding. In such an urgent situation, it may be difficult to properly assess the next steps, but each situation has a different, more cost-efficient option.

"If someone's looking to replace their system, typically it's when they have a certain amount of issues with a unit that needs repairs and it doesn't make sense to put money into repairing it," says Olewine.

If efficiency, sustainability and cutting costs are of interest, a newer model might be the best solution. Companies like Allied Experts offer innovative products that are easier to manage while being kind to the environment. The best option for each home can be determined with full home evaluations. In addition to working to assess the needs of your home, an experienced professional may also help cut down on costs as they are knowledgeable of financing options within the industry.

"There are beneficial tax breaks that customers should be made aware of with the Inflation Reduction Act. Utility programs and the Department of Energy [within the] federal government are going to be very active in pursuing options to help with energy efficiency and savings in the home. Homeowners should be aware that they have options for assistance," Diaz explains.

Beyond accessibility to cost-saving and government assistance programs, upgrading your system increases efficiency of your home, in turn lowering your heating bill.

Smart home models have heightened connectivity to other devices and are designed to provide a higher performance quality and energy efficiency. These electric "smart" heaters can connect to WiFi and can be controlled through phone and voice apps, some have room sensors to optimize usage and allow for programmable cycles.

Compared to home heating systems, fireplaces are more geared toward enjoyment, providing heat to only those nearby. Undoubtedly, a burning fire creates a picturesque holiday atmosphere.

"It's more fun than beneficial, because 80% of people are using fireplaces to heat the room a little bit and also to enjoy the fire, smell and noise of the wood when it burns," says Ardian Bejita, owner of Doctor Chimney.



Burning wood requires a supply and it's best to have experience or practice. It is not as cost-effective or sustainable to use wood compared to gas or electricity. Although wood-burning fireplaces are harmonious with nostalgia, they too have seen a technological upgrade with dozens of choices.

"First-time buyers really need to consider their lifestyle and their time commitment," Chris Olsen, owner of Newtown Fireplace Shop describes. "Are they looking for ease and convenience, or do they really love the smell and the natural crackle of real wood? Do they have the time to burn, to stack and store wood, or are they going to find more value in having ease with the use of a remote control for gas?"

Olsen and his team strive to customize the aesthetic of new fireplaces to fit the style of each home. Many of the Colonial- and farmhouse-style homes in the New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware regions are already equipped with built-in fireplaces. However, these still need to undergo some considerations before they are used.

"Homes that were built any time before 2010 have a very high chance of having a negative efficiency appliance and solvent, meaning customers don't even realize that it's taking the heat out of their home rather than adding heat value to the home," says Dave Rettinger Jr., owner of Rettinger Fireplace Systems. "And when it's not used, it's just a big hole for cold air to pour into the house. So, we have products that solve that exact problem that many thousands of homeowners, either knowingly or unknowingly, are challenged by today."

Fireplace inserts can help with efficiency and are a great way to upgrade a decades-old, wood-burning fireplace to a safer and more energy efficient option. They will convert an existing fireplace opening to wood, gas or electric and will still release smoke through the chimney. If using a fireplace this winter, one should assess the system itself and the chimney.

"People need to inspect the chimney smoke chamber and the lining. So, they need to go in the house, take a look if there are any cracks, any holes, any missing lining—that's very important," advises Bejita.

Chimneys need to be cleaned and inspected before fireplace use. Chimney liners reduce utility costs, streamline maintenance and cleaning, and allow for more safety. Depending on home- and township-specific codes, different types of liner may be installed, often depending on the type of fireplace and the size of the chimney flue. Liners can be made of stainless steel, high thermal re-


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sistance ceramic, clay or aluminum.

Due to all of the necessary aspects that go into a fireplace system that may have to be divided among multiple specialists, some companies will act as a one-stop shop to fully guide a customer through the multifaceted process. Chimney sweeping is required for any system update, which Rettinger Fireplace Systems provides in conjunction with its concierge service.

"If we need a licensed electrician or plumber on the job, we'll hire them for you. If you need permits and inspections, which almost all jobs do, we'll take care of the permits, we'll arrange for the inspections," says Rettinger. "You cannot do anything to an existing fireplace without getting a Level 2 inspection."

The wide range of product options available for heating a home today allow for different types of operation, effect and maintenance. Ultimately, though, warmth in the home is primarily about comfort.

"Homeowners should really take a look at their fireplace to make sure that it's creating an inviting, warm environment that makes their house feel like a home," says Olsen. "Is it providing the ambiance, the atmosphere, the look, the style that fits their energy? They are creating that mindset to make a peaceful home." **H&H**

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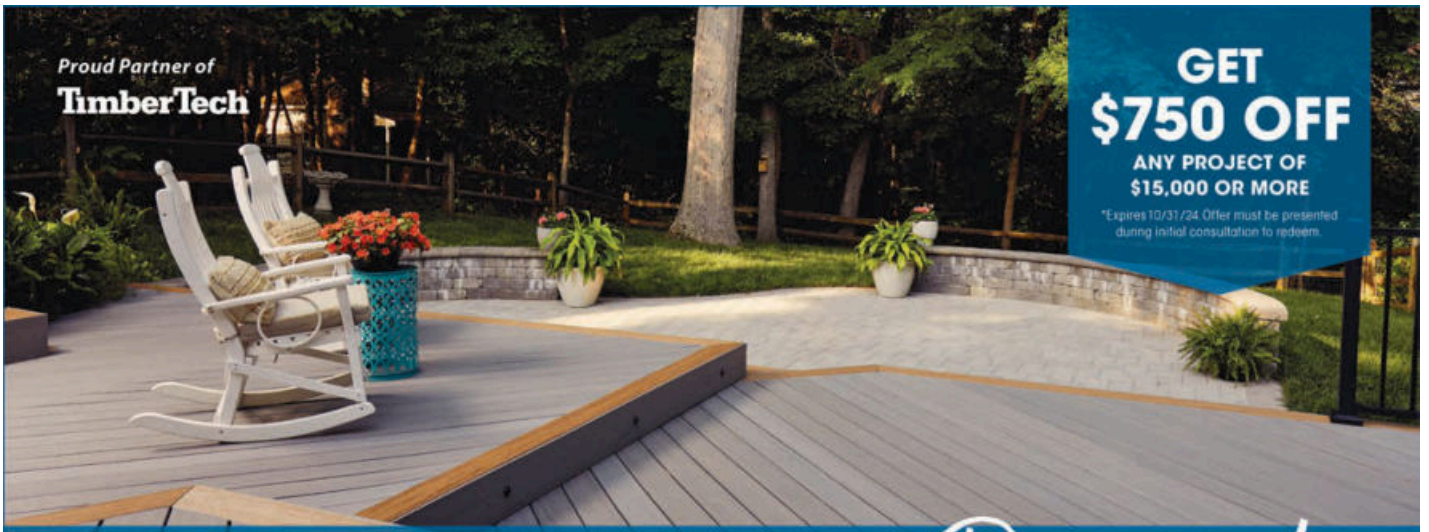
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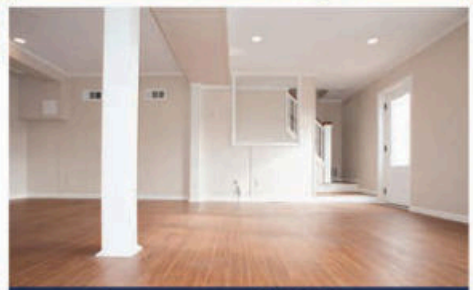
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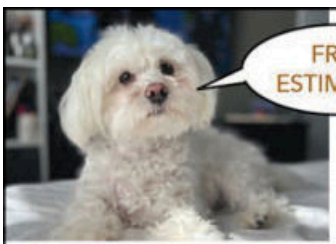
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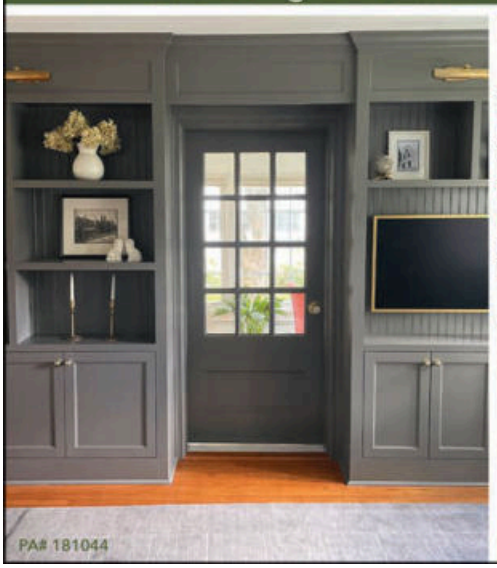


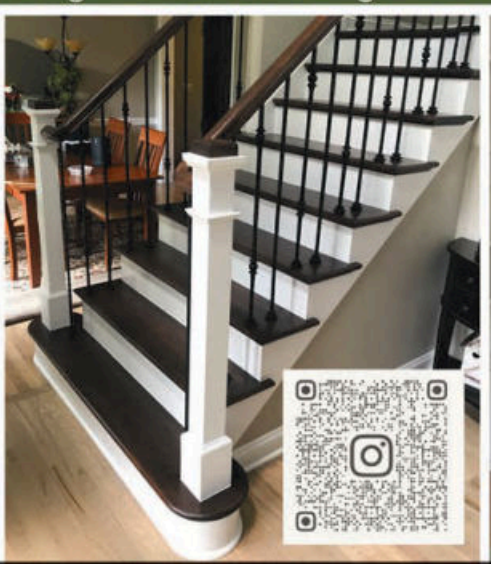
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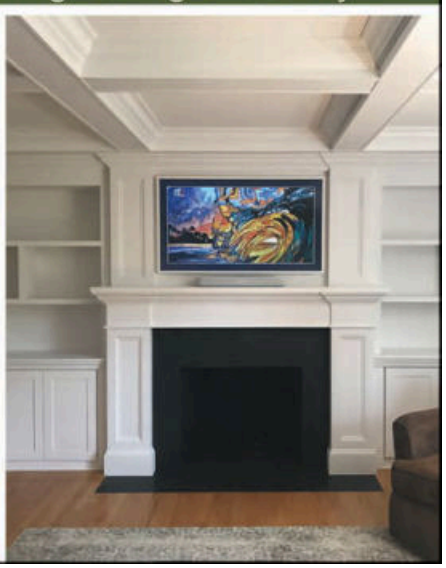
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Take a Spa Retreat at Home

Gehman Design Remodeling turns homeowners' master bathrooms into luxurious oases where they can relax, destress and leave their worries behind. *by* **Lindsey Getz**

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 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.

"Some homeowners might be accustomed to traveling and visiting resorts where they'd have some of these spa amenities," he says. "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 destress, and Gehman says he's getting more requests for them.

Of course, large showers remain popular too. A lot of homeowners want both options. Gehman says 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.

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 the body. Proponents of this feature suggest it's another great way to release stress.

In terms of bathroom flooring, Gehman says tile still reigns. But many homeowners are adding heated tile for a more luxurious 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. Gehman says homeowners can even add towel warmers for that spa-like feel.

"It's really nice to be able to grab for a heated towel," he adds. "It's not something that has to be on all the time. You'd flip a timer switch before getting in the shower or tub, and then your towel will be nice and warm by the time you get out."

In thinking about creating some steam in your bathroom, Gehman says no-fog mirrors are a must. Options include those that are insulated or use heat to prevent steam up. In creating your spa setting, the proper lighting is also key. Gehman suggests lighting on a dimmer switch so you can control brightness. Also, scene-control lighting allows a homeowner to preset a "scene." When you're getting ready in the morning, for example, you might want all of the lights on, but dimmed lights would be best for moments made for relaxing.

"Homeowners may also want a lighted medicine cabinet," Gehman says. "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. While Gehman says he hasn't done too many of them, some homeowners go so far as to install a flat-screen television in the bathroom so they can catch up on the news while getting ready or turn on a soothing channel while soaking in the tub.

"It all comes down to homeowners finding ways to make their at-home spaces more luxurious and enjoyable," Gehman says. "They might not be going on a vacation this year, but they can enjoy a spa experience at home every single day."

While homeowners might think a "spa at home" would be incredibly costly, Gehman says most people are surprised to learn that many of the features are "in reach." Towel warmers, for example, require a modest investment but give an amazing "return on value." In other words, if heated towel warmers are going to help you enjoy your bathroom more than a standard towel rack, it might be worth paying a few more dollars.

"Sometimes the smallest details can make a big difference," he adds.

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.

Gehman Design Remodeling has a proven track record and a long list of happy clients. At press time, Gehman learned that his firm won two Region I - 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. Such high-profile recognition may help homeowners feel confident that they're making a wise choice. H&H

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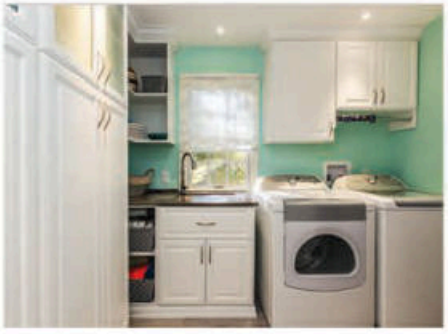


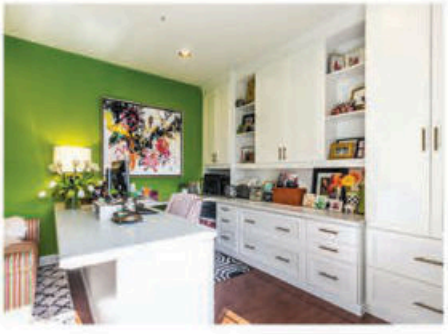
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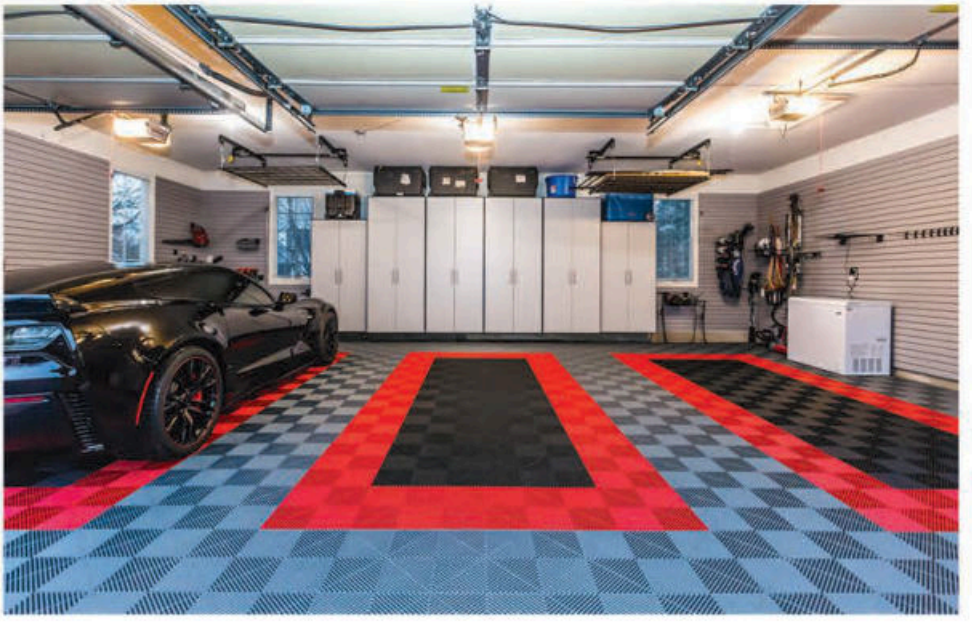
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When you need work done on your home—expected or not—you want to know that you can trust the contractor you've hired to get the job done well. After all, you're not an expert on what's involved in services like roofing, siding or windows, and you don't want to get taken advantage of as a result. Because of that, it's important to choose a company that you can feel confident is reputable.

But how exactly do you know a company can be trusted?

One important factor in choosing the best contractor is longevity. Only a company that performs great work is going to be able to stick around for the long haul. That's exactly the case with Emmons Remodeling, a company that has been offering expert care for South Jersey and the Jersey Shore area since 1996. They are a wellknown name in the region—and for good reason. Their success was built upon a reputation of honesty, integrity and good work.

In fact, the company is an Owens Corning Platinum Preferred Contractor. That's not a designation that any old company can have. Platinum Preferred Contractors are in the top tier of a premier-network of roofing professionals. In order to achieve this title, they must have passed a workmanship inspection, been professionally screened for financial stability and customer service, and continue to adhere to stringent guidelines set forth by Owens Corning. Fewer than 1% of roofing contractors in the United States are Owens Corning Platinum Preferred.

"It's a title that backs up our already strong reputation," says Stephanee Kelly, co-owner of the company along with her husband Matthew. "Only the most reputable companies are able to earn that designation."

Besides being able to feel confident that you've hired a contractor you can trust, this designation benefits homeowners in a more tangible way as well. That's because Platinum Preferred Contractors are able to offer 50-year warranties on their work—much longer than other companies can offer. According to Owens Corning's website, "because we stand behind these warranties, we need to make sure that we are backing up the best roofers in the business."

Emmons Remodeling has been providing interior remodeling service throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania for more than 30 years. The company has built its solid reputation on craftsmanship and exceptional customer service.

As the family-owned company grows, it has expanded the team that is available to help design and build your projects. Several talented remodeling industry professionals have recently joined Emmons to serve its over 6,000 existing customers and help expand the growing number of satisfied customers throughout South Jersey.

And the expertise is not limited kitchens and bathrooms. Emmons provides full-service remodeling and construction services for additions, interior renovations, porches, decks, windows, doors and basement finishing. The design team acts as your trusted advisor to help you make the right decisions on products, materials, colors and selections. They make it easy using a proprietary curated design concept, which is an industry first. It's an easy, affordable way to quickly get a custom designed project without the heavy cost of a design-build process.

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The experts at Emmons are always ready to help you with kitchen, bathroom, additions and deck solutions. They make remodeling your home easy and affordable with exceptional financing programs and realistic pricing. Trust Emmons with your next project.

After all, the Emmons' mission statement is: "Our customer's experience builds our business and defines our reputation, which is one of trust, reliability, integrity and value for every customer we serve."

Choosing Wisely

At the end of the day, your choice in roofing, siding and window contractors can be the difference between good, quality work—and a big headache. Stephanee says that the last thing Emmons wants to see is people in their local community get taken advantage of by unscrupulous roofing, siding and window contractors.

"You should be able to feel confident that you've chosen a contractor that you can trust— not one that is going to leave you with problems to fix after they've gone," she says. "At Emmons, you are not only investing in a new roof, new siding or new windows—you're investing in peace of mind." H&H

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A Step Ahead



Fall is the perfect time to begin winterizing your home.

BY PETER PROKO

With autumn's arrival, countless homeowners are looking forward to admiring the fall foliage and enjoying extended outdoor activities whether around the fire pit, the pumpkin patch or otherwise.

But the fall season also creates a great opportunity to get one's home ready to handle the harsher conditions that Old Man Winter brings. Winterizing your home should be top of mind for all homeowners, as it can solve problems in the short-term while also saving you lots of time, money and aggravation in the long term.

Adam Parnes of Global Home Improvement acknowledges the importance of staying on top of a winter checklist and says that homeowners who don't regularly do so are tempting fate. "I think anyone who is winterizing their home is already ahead of the ball game," he says. "Upgrading insulation, re-caulking windows and cleaning gutters are some of the easier solutions to a safe home this winter."

House & Home spoke with various leaders in the home improvement industry to get a better understanding of the key areas to focus on when winterizing your residence. Whether making energy-efficient upgrades to the interior or making necessary repairs to the exterior that also help boost curb appeal, the fall season offers ample opportunity to rectify any issues now and give homeowners some reassurance for once winter arrives.



Energy Efficiency

Checking to see if one's HVAC system is in need of a tune-up is recommended by industry professionals. Annual service will ensure things are running smoothly and curtail rising energy bills that result from suboptimal operation.

Poorly insulated attic space can also be a major contributor to energy loss. According to the Department of Energy, a properly insulated attic can help slash you heating bill as much as 50%.

Another common contributor to energy loss is poorly sealed windows and doors. "Not only do older windows and doors not have updated thermal efficiency, but many of them have air leaks, which are just inviting cold air directly into your home," says Parnes.

Brian Iwano, founder and project manager with Blue Tree Builders, says it can be difficult for most people to tell if it's time to replace their windows if there's no clear and present physical damage.

"The obvious signs your windows need replacing are when the seal fails and air gets between the panes; and with older wood windows, when the wood becomes damaged. Aside from these examples, it can be difficult to notice air seepage during mild weather," he says.

Roofing & Siding

Replacing one's roof or siding can be a sizable expense and cause some homeowners to delay any major repairs or replacements for another season in hopes they can avoid any catastrophic issues while saving some money. But one major winter storm can change that equation and the result could be an even heftier out-of-pocket cost.



When looking to determine if your roof may be a candidate for either repair or replacement, one tell-tale sign is the appearance of leaks. But there are also other factors to consider, namely age. Is the roof 20-25 years old? If so, it's likely the shingles have or will soon start to curl and the adhesion to one another will become compromised.

"The most important thing to consider is what could happen if you don't replace it," says Parnes. "A leaky roof will cost you way more money in damage then the money you save by trying to wait one more year."

"This may seem obvious, but look for any damage that may have occurred from summer storms," adds Iwano. "It's pretty easy to look for missing shingles. This in itself isn't all bad, as the real waterproofing is maintained by the underlayments and other prep. However, missing shingles do leave your roof open to further wind damage, which would definitely cause bigger problems very quickly."

Danny Cenaj of Siar Construction says in addition to seeing missing or buckled shingles that are no longer lying flat, there are other noticeable changes you may recognize. "If one area is much darker than another part of the roof; that is one of the other signs that it may be time to get a roof inspection. Another thing would be if you are cleaning your gutters and you are able to see a lot of granules that have fallen from the shingles," he says.

If your roof is old or you are not sure it will last another winter, fall is actually the ideal time to have it replaced. In the summer when battling extreme heat and humidity, the shingles can occasionally become damaged during the installation process, something that is certainly avoidable thanks to fall's cooler temperatures.

"The fall is one of the best times of the year to replace the roof," affirms Cenaj. "Homeowners can make sure they get everything done right before winter, which gives them peace of mind that they will not have to contend with any issues."



A Step Ahead



Elsewhere on the exterior, Iwano points out that problems with siding usually occur at transition points either between trims or moldings, or aluminum capping. "Additionally, end pieces and tops commonly become loose, which also [could lead] to further wind damage. Again, like roofing, the real protection is in the prep. But you definitely want to mitigate any vulnerability as soon as possible," he says.

Chimneys

For those who enjoy lighting a fire inside the home during the winter months, fall is also the right time to have your chimney serviced, as a detailed inspection can help to uncover any potential hidden issues.

"Inspections will check for any cracks in the cement or the mortar or if there are any other problems, and you will be able to determine if the chimney will be good for the winter or not," says Cenaj.

At the very minimum, Cenja advises homeowners to have their chimneys cleaned before seasonal use. "Getting a chimney cleaned is something I would say is mandatory every fall before you start using your fireplace," he says.

Preparing Your Pond

It's important to know how to winterize a pond and prepare fish to withstand the harsh winter. Over a year, your pond will accumulate debris and organics such as leaves, twigs, grass clippings and fish waste. Left unchecked, decaying debris can release toxic gas and reduce oxygen levels. Removing this debris and replacing filtration systems with aeration kits and deicers will help ensure oxygen levels stay as high as possible and provide aeration,

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ventilation and circulation throughout the winter months.

"When fall officially arrives, and the trees start losing their leaves, we often recommend netting your pond," says George Mihalchick of Ponds by George.

Fall netting is intended for collecting debris, and is often a choice to use for predator protection, which is why some pond owners even choose to leave the net in place until spring, but it is important to note that these nets are not designed to carry a heavy snow load, and should be removed in the winter before any snowfall.

"Once all the leaves have fallen, begin your fall pond care by removing any netting. Pond netting should be stored indoors to keep it safe from wear and tear due to heavy snowfall and ice," says Mihalchick.

As fall ends and winter approaches, plants will naturally fall into a dormant state. To winterize hardy plants, use your pruning tools to trim off dead foliage just above the soil. Removing debris that may have made it into the pond should also be removed. "Rotting leaves, twigs or dead aquatic plants will put stress on your pond's oxygen levels throughout the winter, which puts your fish at risk. I recommend removing leaves and debris from ponds and streams with the help of a hand net if possible," Mihalchick details.

Another way to keep fish safe when temperatures drop is with the help of aeration, and de-icers help to keep a hole open in the ice during winter months. "This prevents harmful gases from being trapped under the ice and allows oxygen levels to stay saturated in the pond. Or if your pond has a waterfall, leave it running, the movement will cause a natural opening," Mihalchick explains. **H&H**

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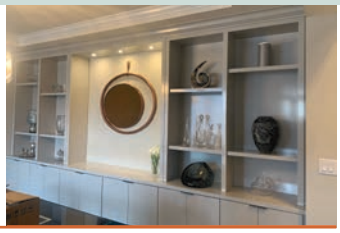
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WHETHER YOU'RE LOOKING TO DISPLAY YOUR SHOE OR EXOTIC HANDBAG COLLECTION, ELEVATE YOUR WINE CELLAR OR SIMPLY WANT TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR HOME, ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN IS KEY. Thoughtful planning can ensure the maximization of your space, allow you to achieve your dream aesthetic and boost the value of your home.

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

WHAT SEPARATES CLOSET FACTORY FROM OTHER BUSINESSES IN THIS INDUSTRY?

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CLOSET FACTORY DOES MUCH MORE THAN CLOSETS. CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT THE OTHER SERVICES YOU OFFER?

By virtue of the fact that our name is Closet Factory, the majority of our business focuses on simple to spectacular closets, although we offer whole-home organization solutions for pantries, home offices, garages, mudrooms, entertainment centers, wine rooms and all areas of home organization except kitchen and baths. While we provide a great deal of low-voltage lighting, we depend on electrical and plumbing professionals to deal with those areas of responsibility.

WHAT DOES ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN BRING TO A HOME?

Our designs are meant to focus on two areas—organization and aesthetics. While many in our industry overlook vertical planning, a 10-foot simple reach-in closet could almost double the storage capacity of this small space. With vertical planning, we not only maximize the space but we can make it as aesthetically pleasing as the customer desires. The mission of each one of our designers is to maximize storage capacity while bringing a level of calm or excitement to the environment. The homeowner is a collaborative partner during the design process, and they play an essential role in us designing and installing a home organizational solution that meets with their ultimate expectations.

WHAT ARE SOME TRENDS YOU'VE NOTICED IN TERMS OF DESIGN AND PROJECT TYPES?

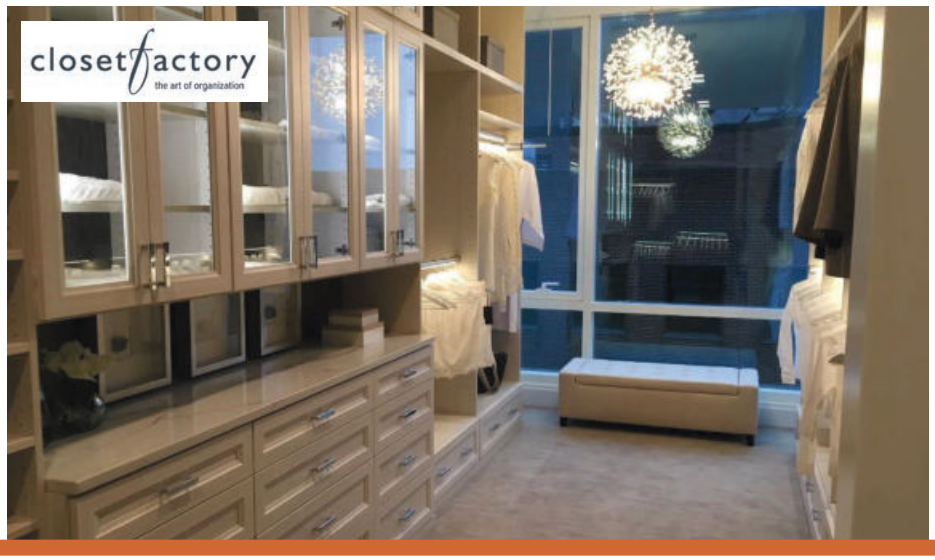
Since everything we design and produce is custom based on the organizational requirements and aesthetic appearance of our customers' individual tastes, we've seen the trend leaning toward systems that are more upscale that match the interior influence of the home. Our customers have certainly gravitated to organizational projects—simple or spectacular—that give them peace of mind and a sense of calm. In the past, our customers and home builders have focused on the importance of kitchens and bathrooms but now home organization and a well-planned closet or pantry have become a significant focus for the most discriminating buyers. As professional organizer and author Christina Scalise says, "Organization isn't about perfection, it's about efficiency, reducing stress, saving time and money, and improving your overall quality of life."

Since COVID, more people are working from home. This trend has created new requirements for many of our customers who have decided to transform a spare bedroom or unused space into a productive working environment while still maintaining sleeping options with the installation of a home office and wall bed.

With the hectic athletic lives of most families, garage organization has become paramount to organize tools, athletic equipment and garden accessories while maintaining space for the family car.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR STARTING A NEW PROJECT?

An initial phone call to schedule a no obligation design consultation. From there our designers will meet, review inventory requirements, consult on aesthetic and budget expectations, and then start the design process with the use of a computer-aided design (CAD) program. Within an hour or two, and in collaboration with the homeowner, the organizational expectations and storage requirements will come to life in a 3D image. If all is in order, the project will be placed on the production and installation calendar and our expert installers will transform the original space into a space of beauty and calm. H&H





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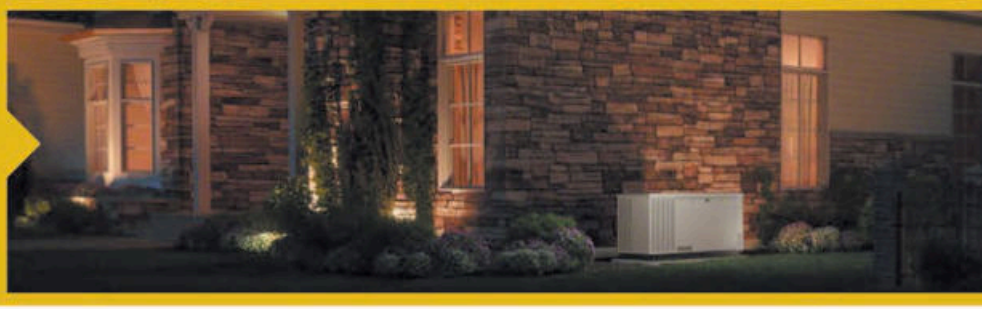
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