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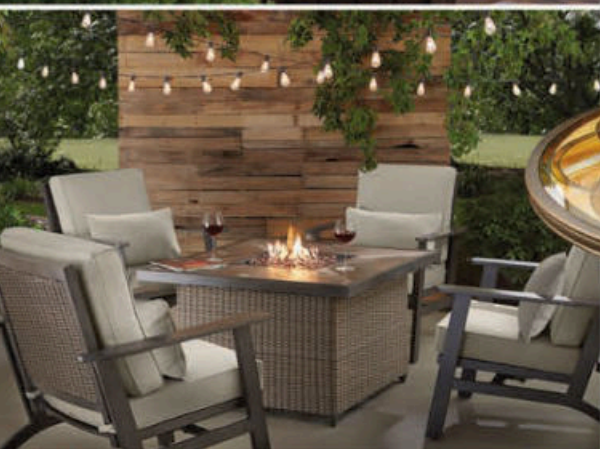
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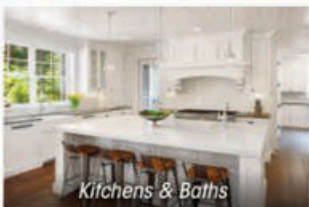
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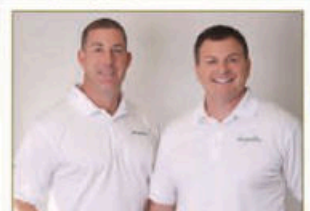
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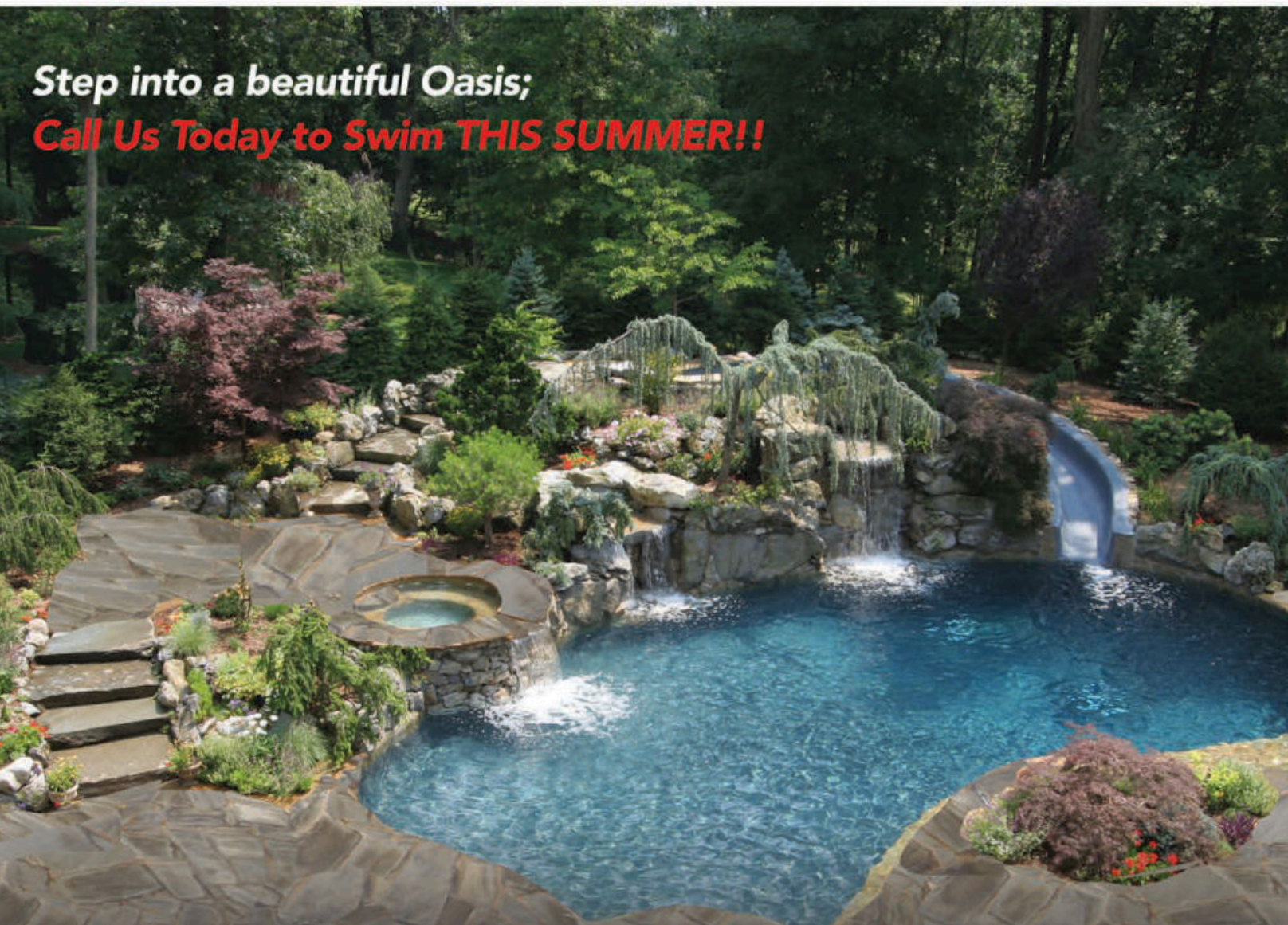
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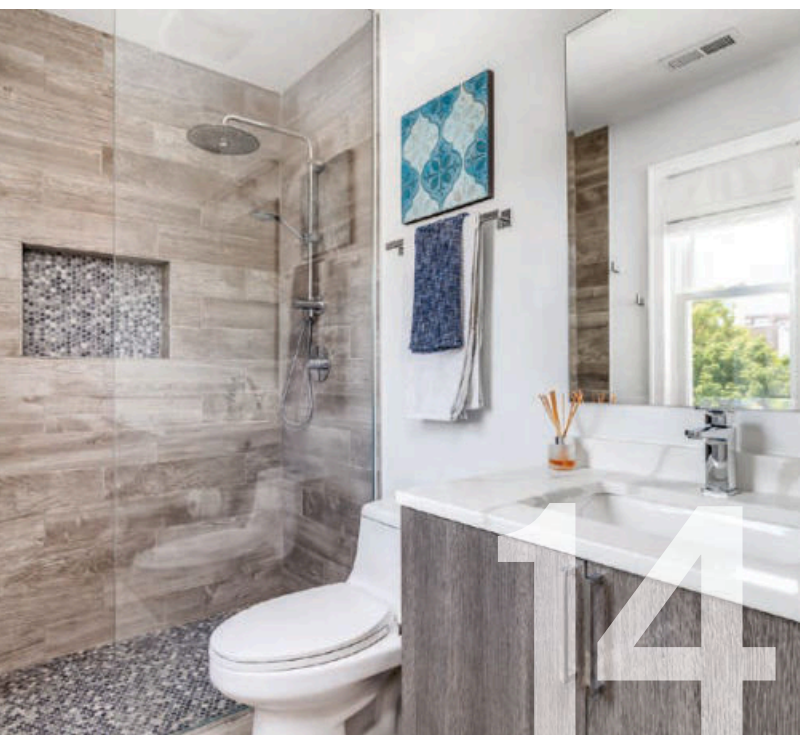
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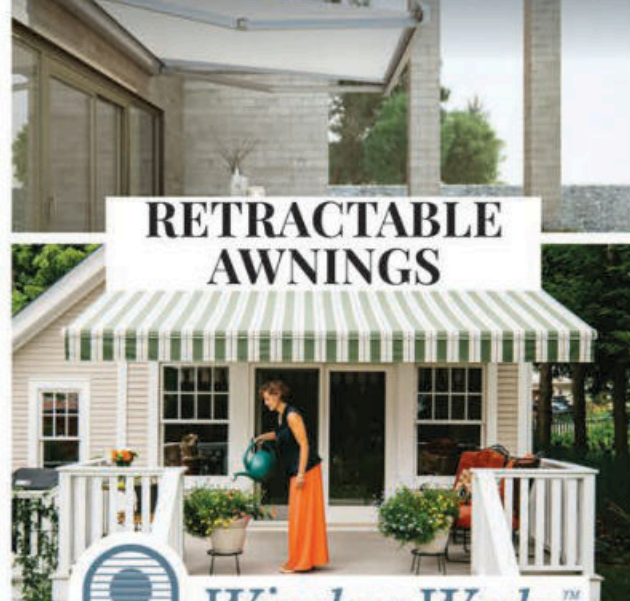
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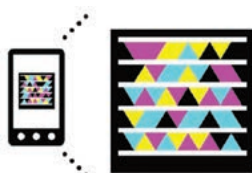
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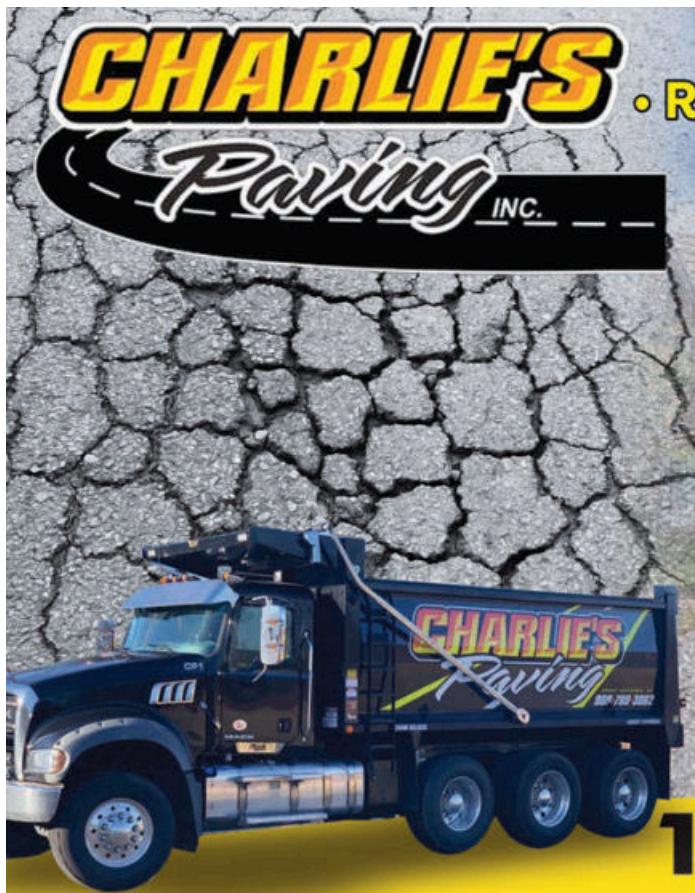
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FIVE TIPS THE LICENSED LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS AT CLC LANDSCAPE DESIGN USE TO CREATE BEAUTIFUL PROPERTIES FOR THEIR CLIENTS.

Designed Beauty

by Matt Cosentino

For the past four decades, Richard Cording Sr. has taken great pride in helping homeowners all over North Jersey get more connected to nature. Whether it's an array of colorful flowers, a waterfall or an outdoor living space with modern amenities, his goal as the founder and owner of CLC Landscape Design is to merge creativity with practical knowledge and give people a reason to be outside, spending quality time with loved ones.

But the end result that homeowners come to love takes careful planning down to the last detail, an experienced team of professionals and collaboration with the clients. A licensed landscape architect is trained to see the property as a whole, with each facet working in symmetry and contributing to the overall style and function. CLC has nine licensed landscape architects/designers on staff, including Cording.

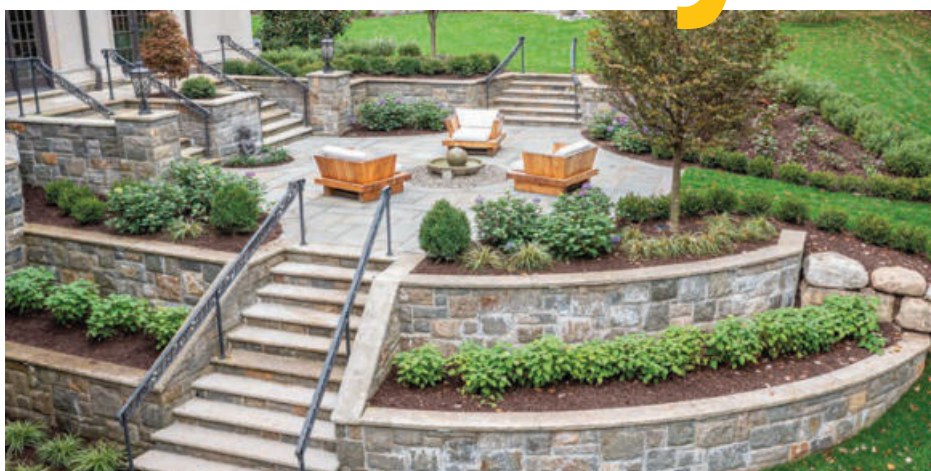
Cording shares his five essential tips for creating a backyard paradise.

1. Determine the landscape design styles that resonate with the homeowner.

At the first meeting, CLC will show photos to the client and start a conversation about their preferences. "We try to establish the best style for the client such as traditional, Hamptons or contemporary," Cording says. "Then we develop a theme that flows throughout the whole design."

2. Determine how the property will be used by the family.

Some homeowners like to entertain and others want to keep the space to themselves, adding a vegetable garden or outdoor living room with a fireplace, kitchen and pergola. Getting to know their lifestyle enables CLC to design a space that is uniquely customized to their needs.



3. Consider views from inside the house.

It is a must to take into account how the yard will be seen from certain key areas inside the home, and to draw the eye to focal points like an outdoor fireplace or rolling hills in the distance.

4. Integrating a pool into the backyard.

Pool companies that do not work closely with a landscape architect may just construct a pool anywhere on the property, without taking into account traffic flow, location of the sun and the pool's relationship to surrounding plantings. CLC's team carefully integrates a pool into the landscape, creating an inviting space.

5. Plant in masses and repeat masses of color.

Some homeowners pick out a wide variety of flowers and plants, leading to a spotty look. "But when you plant 25 of the same plant in one area and then you repeat that same plant somewhere else on the property, it creates a sense of harmony with splashes of color," Cording says.

Cording and his sons, Richard Jr. and Eric, welcome the chance to beautify more yards as we head into spring and prepare for summer.

"For human beings to feel really alive, they need to be part of nature," he says. "They can have a small yard and still have something designed by a landscape architect that is beautiful, inviting and inspiring." **H&H**

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(Left to right) Eric Cording, Landscape Designer; Richard Cording Sr., Licensed Landscape Architect; Richard Cording Jr., Master of Landscape Design, Columbia University

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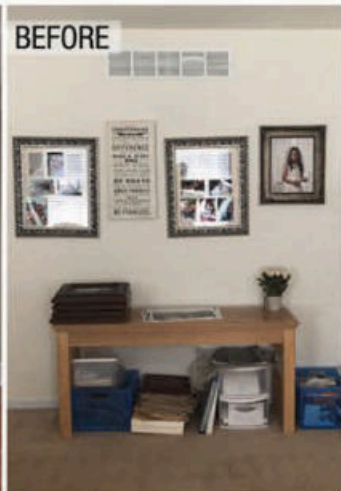
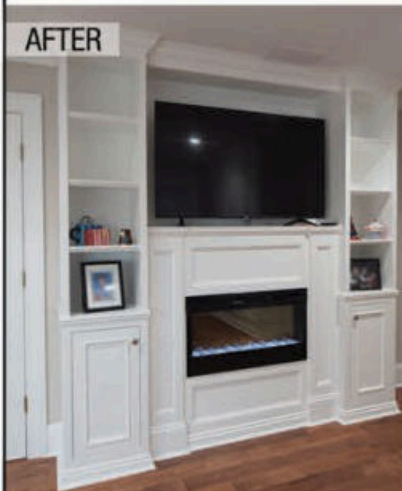
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Here to Please

As the founder and owner of a decking company that is well known throughout New Jersey for delivering sensational outdoor spaces on time and on budget, Ion Colbasiuc certainly understands what it's like to have his services in high demand. Work especially picks up in late spring and early summer, when the weather is getting warmer and homeowners are dreaming of adding a backyard oasis to their property.

Even at this time of the year, however, Colbasiuc will never find excuses to give a customer the cold shoulder. When he started Deck Guardian over a decade ago, his motivation was to not only provide the finest craftsmanship but also a positive, stress-free experience, and that remains his driving factor to this day.

"Service should be a lot better than what it is across the construction industry," he says. "People call in to get an estimate and they can't get ahold of anybody, they can't get anyone to come out for three weeks to even give them a quote, and once they get the quote it takes too long to get the contract in place.

"We try to make it a lot easier on them. If you call us we'll be there in a few days, we'll get you a price on the deck and if you want to build it, we'll build it as soon as possible. Some people have simple projects and some have more elaborate projects, but it should be as easy as walking in, buying something and having it at your house two months later rather than chasing someone around to answer the phone or give you a price."

That attention to detail is even more important in today's climate, where supply chain issues, rising material costs and difficulties to obtain permits are real challenges. Getting on the schedule early ensures that family dinners, summer barbecues and graduation parties can be enjoyed sooner rather than later.

From the very first meeting, Colbasiuc stresses transparency between his team and the homeowner. He frequently hears the same questions from prospective customers, starting with how much the deck will cost, and takes the time to carefully explain the many variables that will determine the price. Those include



Customer service has always been and remains the No. 1 priority for **Deck Guardian** as it creates beautiful outdoor spaces for homeowners to enjoy.

By **Matt Cosentino**

the location and whether the soil makes for easy or hard installation of the footings; the cost of building permits in a particular town; the proximity from the driveway to the backyard to transport materials and debris; and whether the deck is low to the ground or on the second story.

"There are multiple factors that come into play when we are pricing a project and it changes on a case-by-case basis," Colbasiuc says. "Most of the projects that we do are around 300-400 square feet and they're within the price range of \$20,000-\$25,000. But decks are going to last 25-30 years and if you're spending \$20,000 on a deck, you're getting at least \$15,000 in real estate value."

Customers expect the design process to be complicated, but Deck Guardian takes the approach of creating an outdoor space that is just like the homeowners' favorite rooms inside while accounting for important details like traffic flow and the best place for stairs. "Decks are primarily used for grilling, dining and lounging, so when we're putting together a project, we want to make sure that you have enough space for all three activities," he says.

A shade structure can make the deck usable

in extreme heat or rain, and a porch with outdoor heaters can extend the enjoyment into the colder months of the year. Colbasiuc is happy to add whatever amenities make sense for a customer's lifestyle and budget.

When it comes to the timeline for the deck's completion, fall, winter and early spring have the quickest turnarounds, while the summer tends to get extremely busy and will push the project back a bit. Different towns have different processes for granting permits but Deck Guardian has dedicated staff just for this task.

"Most of the decks we build average about a week for installation, so once we get started it will be done before you know it," Colbasiuc says. "But before you start it's a lot of hassles and paperwork, which we handle so the customer doesn't have to."

Nothing beats the feeling when the job is finished and the end result is a beautiful space ready for new memories to be created.

"When it's all done everybody is just thrilled with how much better it came out than they were expecting," he says. "They can look at a picture ahead of time but it's just a picture. When they actually get the space and see how nice it looks against the house, how much room they have and how good the installation is, they have a really good impression."

"It's a great experience for them because our service is really what makes the difference. As long as we stick with our core values, people will appreciate it. That's why we have the best reputation in the state and we're on target to build 700 decks this year." **H&H**

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The Big Potential

OF SMALL BATHROOMS

by **Madeleine Maccar**

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

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

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

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

"I don't really consider them any dif-

ferently because, regardless of the size of the project or the location of the project, the detail and the quality should always be the same," says Anthony DellaPia, president of Floors Just for You. "Whether it is a powder room or a luxurious master bath, we treat them equally."

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

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

their attention on homes' smaller washrooms.

Same Quality, Different Mindset

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

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

"I've seen a lot of projects through the years and, in most cases, when people have hall bathrooms, they're primarily used for children or guests, and there's a big division between a personal bathroom that you use

for yourself and your significant other versus one that's used by the kids," agrees David Cerami, owner of HomeTech Renovations. "The mindset is, do you take your kids to a five-star restaurant? Most people are looking to do their hall baths a little more reasonably rather than making the major design statement they would with their master bath."

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

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

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

Making the Most of Small Spaces

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

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



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

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

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

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

For guest bathrooms and powder rooms,

those lesser-used spaces present an opportunity to showcase statements pieces that pop but might not be practical for everyday use.

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

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

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



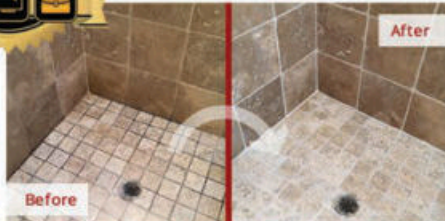
"If you go from a tub to a standup shower, you can gain way more space in your bathroom because the shower base is smaller, reducing almost two feet of space that a tub would need," adds Lima. "That way you can add some shelves in that space you get back right next to the shower for things like towels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

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

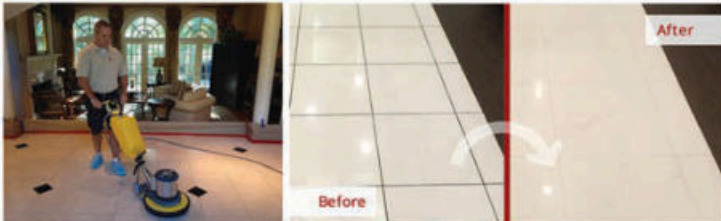
"If there's a way to make a bathroom bigger, people always want to make it bigger," Lima continues. "If they want to have a linen closet in the bathroom, they'll get rid of that closet, which is what we normally do."



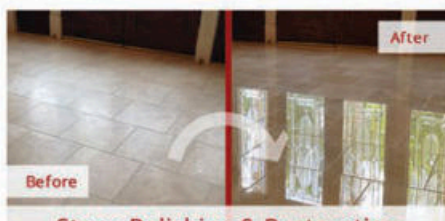
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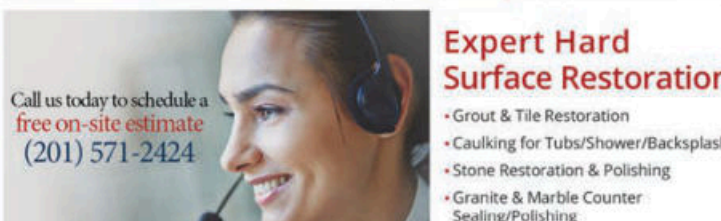
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Since these types of bathrooms rely more on interior lighting than natural sunlight, choosing those fixtures is an important decision. Sconces can provide an upgrade that not only add some character to a small bathroom but also create more natural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

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

Trust the Professionals

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

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

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

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



RESOURCES

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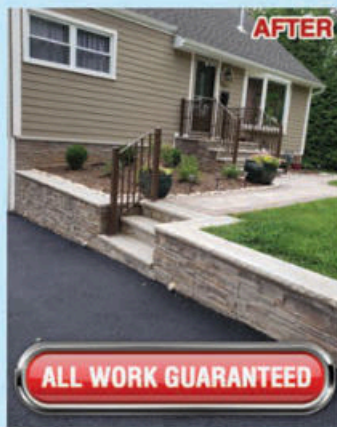
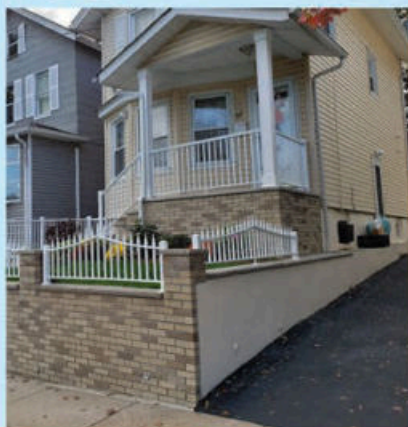
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By **Liz Hunter**

There are a lot of people whose lives were changed on 9/11, especially those who survived it, including Jason Werner. He graduated in the top of his class at Clemson University and was working as a financial advisor until that fateful day altered the trajectory of his life. He left the corporate world and briefly went into teaching, eventually ending up as a project manager for a pool company. This is where he learned how a business should not be run.

"I saw the way things should not be done—overpromising, lacking customer service and transparency," Jason says. It inspired him to break out on his own and in 2010 he founded EverClear Pools & Spas. "Every decision I make as the owner of this company is based on customer experience and what I have learned over the years in this industry. We're customer and family focused, so we work with them to get what they want with the budget they have."

EverClear started with just a handful of accounts and is now one of the larger premium pool builders in New Jersey, with several awards under its belt from the Northeast Spa & Pool Association.

The way the company has scaled since 2010 is nothing short of impressive. "When I started, I didn't know how big it would get, but this is just the beginning for us," he says. "We were scaling before the pandemic hit. We moved into our newly constructed office building and hired a number of employees for key positions. Now, our staff is four times the size of what it was pre-pandemic."

He has plans to open offices across multiple states and expand EverClear's presence in the market. He credits this to his talented employees. "We're continuously hiring and we're very selective

with the people we bring into our ecosystem, making sure they mesh with our culture," he says. Drawing from his corporate background, Jason also offers employees a 401(k) plan, pays for life insurance for all employees and medical benefits are in the works. "Benefits like this are typically unheard of in this industry and it's brought a lot of highly qualified people to our company because they hear how we treat our team."

When it comes to pool construction, EverClear focuses on custom gunite and vinyl pools, built with only the highest quality materials. The company also has a dedicated service division and coordinates landscaping, hardscaping and fencing, should a client need those services to complete their backyard paradise.

"We don't cut corners on any aspect of any job. We have one of the strongest reputations in the industry," Jason says.

That reputation is built on customer service values, the most important of which is transparency, he states. "When we meet you for the estimate, we're going over the full cost and scope of the project, not just the pool. The pool is half the project, but there are a ton of details that other companies might just gloss over: engineering costs, dirt removal, permit fees, patio, coping, fencing and more. These are all things that a customer might not think of when shopping for a pool and going over it with them is usually an eye opener."

This philosophy helped craft EverClear's mission statement: "We Help Families Make Memories That Last A Lifetime Through Building Relationships And Continued Service."

"We're focused on delivering a high-quality pool experience for families, whether that's a

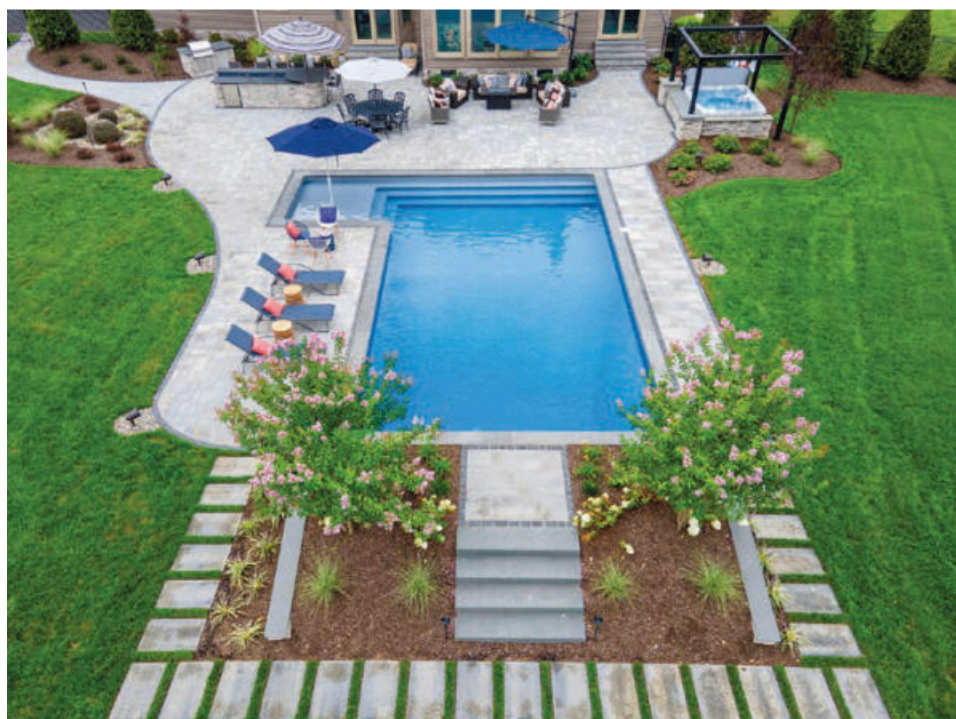
basic pool or something extravagant, we make it happen. There are companies out there where the first question they ask is your budget, because they only think about money. We're not like that. We focus on the client's goals and tailor the product to what they are looking for," says Jason.

Once a customer decides to work with EverClear, the team handles every detail, from securing engineered plans to obtaining permits and this continues through construction with the help of two project managers overseeing every job. Once the pool is completed, customers are seamlessly transitioned into EverClear's service division to ensure the pool is maintained properly and regularly. The company purchases all of the pool equipment it will need for the year up front and stores it in a warehouse, which has been a major benefit while the supply chain crisis lingers.

"Keeping these services under one roof streamlines communication. We do our best to return all calls and emails within 24 hours, and with the depth of our office and field staff, we're able to pivot faster than other companies," Jason says. "While some have been trying to complete more work with fewer employees since the pandemic, we're continuously adding people so the projects are completed more smoothly."

Although enjoying a backyard pool may be a seasonal pleasure, he says customers can expect their relationship with EverClear to last much longer. "We want to build client relationships that will last for the next 30 years, not a season or two." **H&H**

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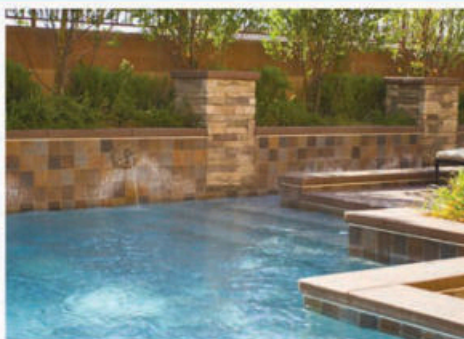
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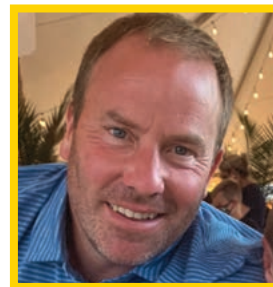
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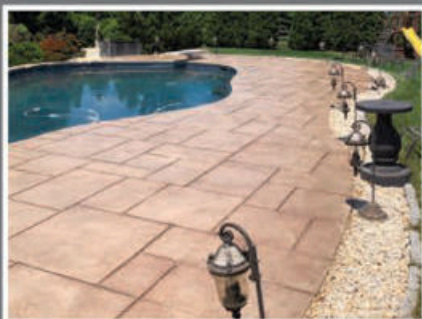
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