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North Jersey

Your #1 Resource and Design Magazine

Volume 24, Issue 7



CLC Landscape Design

Beautifying new pools with elegant, maintenance-free synthetic turf *page 18*

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These fine service providers sponsor our 25th Anniversary Edition:

ARTIFICIAL GRASS Turf Warehouse Pg. 3

Closets byDesign Pg. 9

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A Welcome Addition

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Swim-Mor Pools & Spas

Custom designs that help elevate your backyard *page 11*

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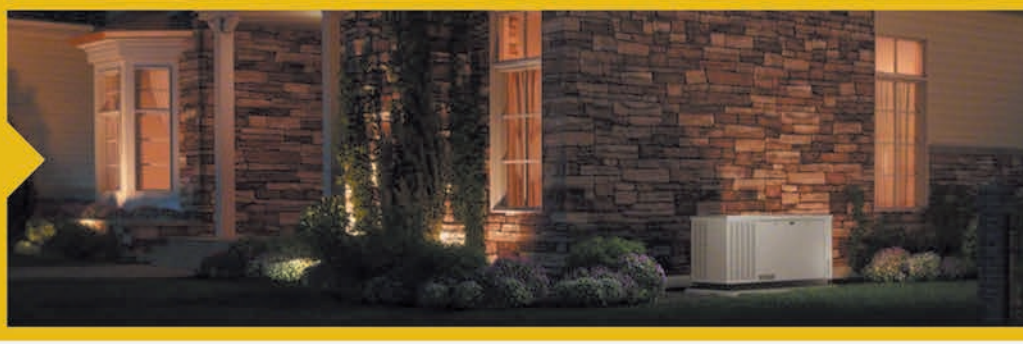
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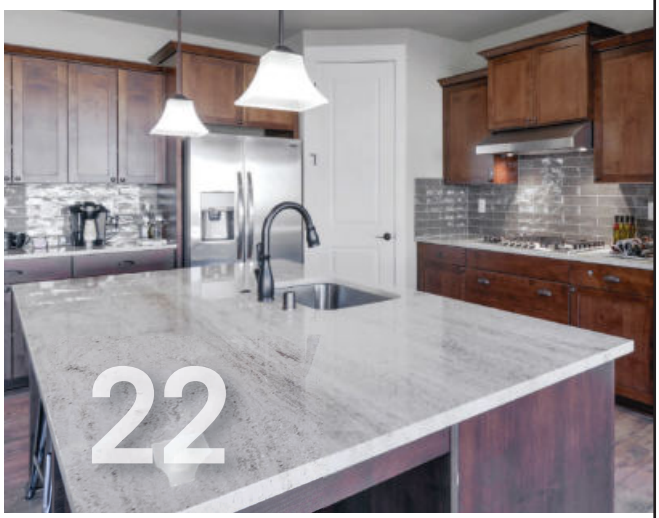
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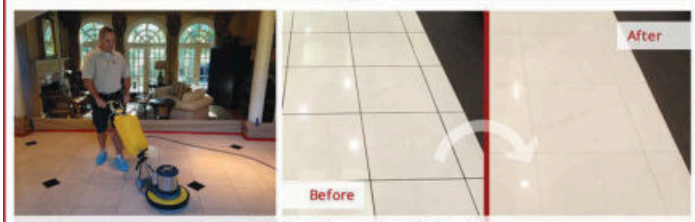
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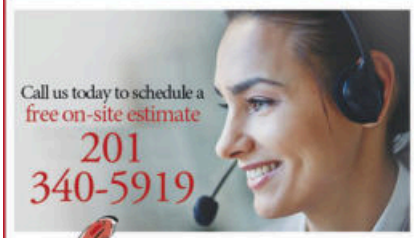
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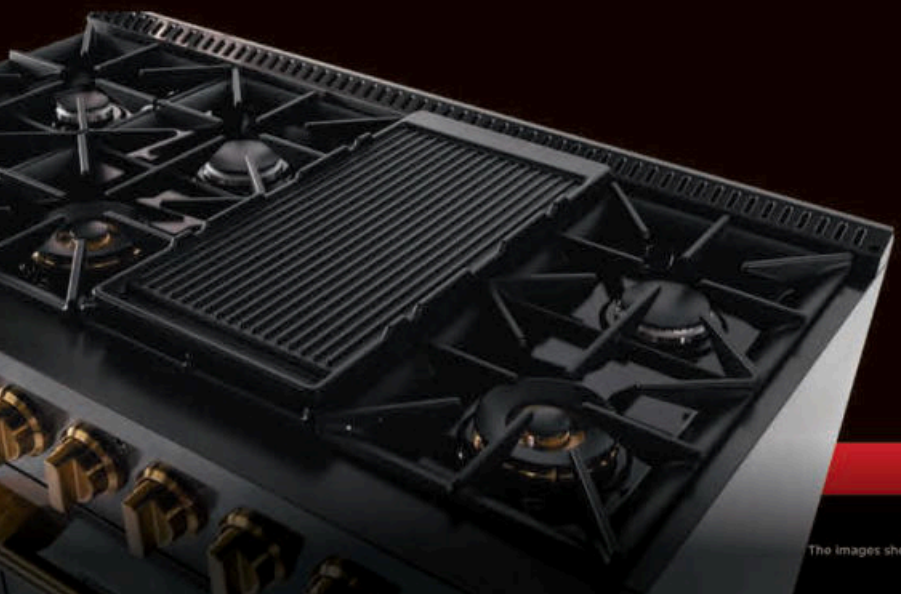
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National Sales Office:
HOUSE & HOME Magazine, LLC
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More Than a Pool

Swim-Mor Pools & Spas elevates backyard atmospheres with quality custom designs

by **Kristen Dowd**

Swim-Mor Pools & Spas partner and general manager Mike McCool recognizes that there is a lot more that goes into a new pool than there used to be.

"The backyard has transformed over the last 10 years or so away from being just 'your yard' and into another room of your home with the same care and detail put into it," McCool says. "Because of this the design of your pool has become more than just a pool but the focus of the outdoor living room. There is a lot of coordination with creating what a customer's backyard haven is going to be."

Fortunately, the family-owned South Jersey business is more than up to the challenge of bringing a customer's backyard pool vision to life. In its 55 years of business, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas has helped to create thousands of backyard paradises throughout the region.

And what's more, they make the process as easy as possible for their customers.

"We're a start-to-finish gunite custom pool company—the design, the build and the service afterward," McCool says. "We have our own crews that handle the work which helps us control quality and makes the process go smoother."

There are six designers at Swim-Mor Pools & Spas who can help guide customers on a new pool design. The company's countless photos and 3D drawings can provide inspiration, and the final design is what best suits the backyard, according to McCool.

"Size, setbacks, elevations. We're here to help you work through that," he says.

Finding the right pool

"The first step is to give us a call. From there we'll set up an appointment to come out to your home," McCool says. "That way we can see all the aspects of the property. What the contours of the yard are. What the access is like. Even the best location based on where the sun rises and sets."

The timeline to get started is largely based on the homeowner and how decisive they are, McCool adds. Once everything is confirmed, things move to contract and Swim-Mor Pools & Spas starts working on permits.

"Time is of the essence. Permits can take from two weeks to several months, all depending on the municipality," McCool says.

Pool popularity

Prior to March 2020, business was strong for Swim-Mor Pools & Spa. That was only boosted when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the region.

"The pool business was never busier than it was in COVID," McCool says. "The lockdowns forced people to stay at home and they immediately focused on the backyard."

Although that business boom has settled down a bit, things are still busy. But pool trends, according to McCool, have held fairly steady.

Hampton-style pools have long been a customer favorite, but equally popular are the freeform designs, which can be customized to fit into any backyard environment.

"Through COVID there have not been many significant changes in the industry," McCool says, "other than the increased popularity of adding more bells and whistles to the pool."

Natural stone is popular for the coping along the pool's edge, McCool says, as well as darker finishes in the pool. A majority of Swim-Mor Pools & Spa customers are using a salt sanitation system and automated controls in their new pools, as well as choosing to add water features—waterfalls, fountains, deck jets and plenty more. The company also offers many in- pool fixtures for lounging—bar stools and benches that can tie into your outdoor kitchen or can run inside the pool, along with table areas, sundecks for your lounge chairs and custom fire features. Color LED lighting packages come with every pool, too.

The majority of customers also choose elements to lengthen their pool-enjoying season, such as heaters and spas. "It will extend your pool season by a few months," McCool says.

Why Swim-Mor Pools & Spas?

Being a local family-owned independent business makes Swim-Mor Pools & Spas a smart choice for customers, according to McCool.

"We're not national. We're not a franchise. And we do not try to sell everything. Our expertise has been building custom gunite pools for 55 years and that's what we focus on," he says.

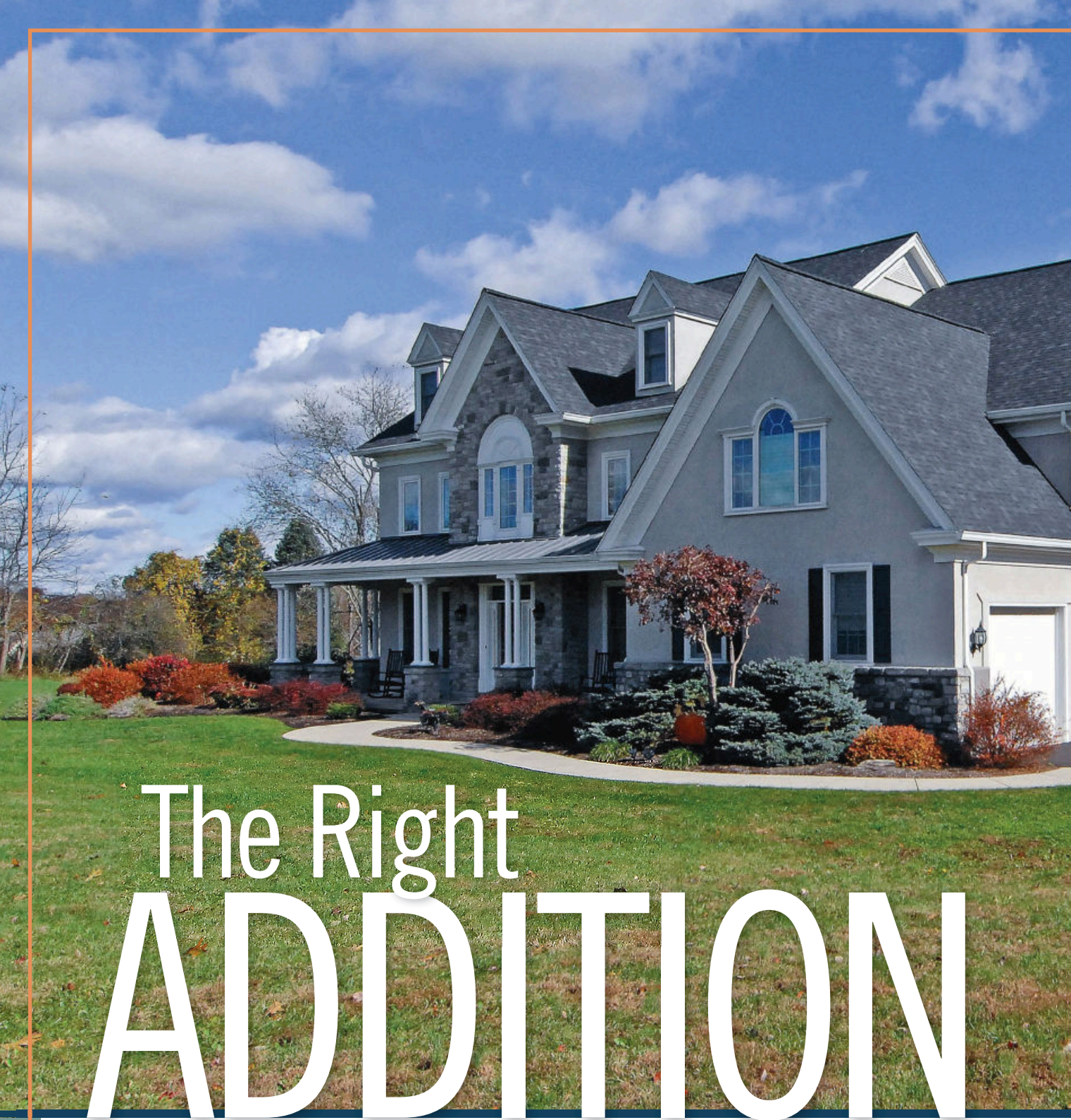
Save for a few aspects that are legally required to be outsourced to independent licensed contractors, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas uses all of their own crews for the pool construction, which McCool says is unique for the pool business.

In addition to building new pools, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas also specializes in renovating gunite pools. The experienced team can handle everything from your standard renovation of replacing your coping, tile and plaster finish, to adding features such as raised water features, sun decks, and even spas that were not originally built with the pool. McCool says, "Even though your pool may not have originally been built with the more current popular features doesn't mean that Swim-Mor cannot add them now."

The 2023 pool season is already underway for the business, which thanks to the mild winter meant they were able to start construction early. Pool openings and service will ramp up from mid-April to Memorial Day.

But, for those looking to add a pool to their backyard this summer, it's not too late. "We're still building for this year. We're still selling for this summer," McCool says. "But don't waste time. Get in!" H&H

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The Right ADDITION

Whether you're adding an extra suite for loved ones, an entertainment room, a second kitchen or something else entirely, **the possibilities for a home addition are endless.** by Carly Murray



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REMODELING A ROOM OR REDESIGNATING ITS GOALS MAY WORK FOR A QUICK FIX, BUT EXPERTS ARE SEEING A RISE IN HOMEOWNERS ADDING SPACE TO THEIR HOMES. This allows for full creativity in idea conceptualization as it's not only starting from scratch, but also designing an area from inception and influencing its structure. If it's realistic, and township-approved, the sky's the limit for inventiveness and artistry, especially with the guidance of a professional.

"It takes a fair amount of time to do the planning … but what can happen is, over time the more you think about it, the project sort of grows in your mind and maybe you want to add things. The better a project is planned up-front, the smoother it goes while it's happening. And for us, 99% of the time, the people are living at home while we're doing the renovations, so it's extremely important that we have things well-planned out," says Dennis Gehman, president of Gehman Design Remodeling.

The time frame for each project is different depending on lifestyle, expectations and various methods of planning. Some might like to take their time and ensure every detail is mapped out before construction begins. Others might like to decide on elements as they go after seeing their ideas come to life. It's important to remember that it is an undertaking that requires several moving pieces.

"You want to at least give yourself a good six months to basically come up with a written scope, decide on a floor plan, have material selections, and then also allow ample time for permitting and lining up your trades for construction because that can take a little time," explains Eileen Lee, operations manager of Total Home Solution.

Homeowners generally know what they want by the time they call a professional, but for those still in the brainstorming phase, there are plenty of sources of inspiration already out there. From home bars, sun rooms, libraries, kids' lounges and music rooms to a room decked out in sports memorabilia perfect for inviting loved ones to watch the game, any passion can become a reality with the help of a professional. With the internet in addition to print publications and television, there's millions of models available to spark your vision.

"Do a little bit of homework and gather some inspiration. Have some ideas and those details that you're really set on having. That way, we can give a more accurate proposal in the beginning. Because with an addition, things can get complicated and things can get missed. So, it's really good to have a little

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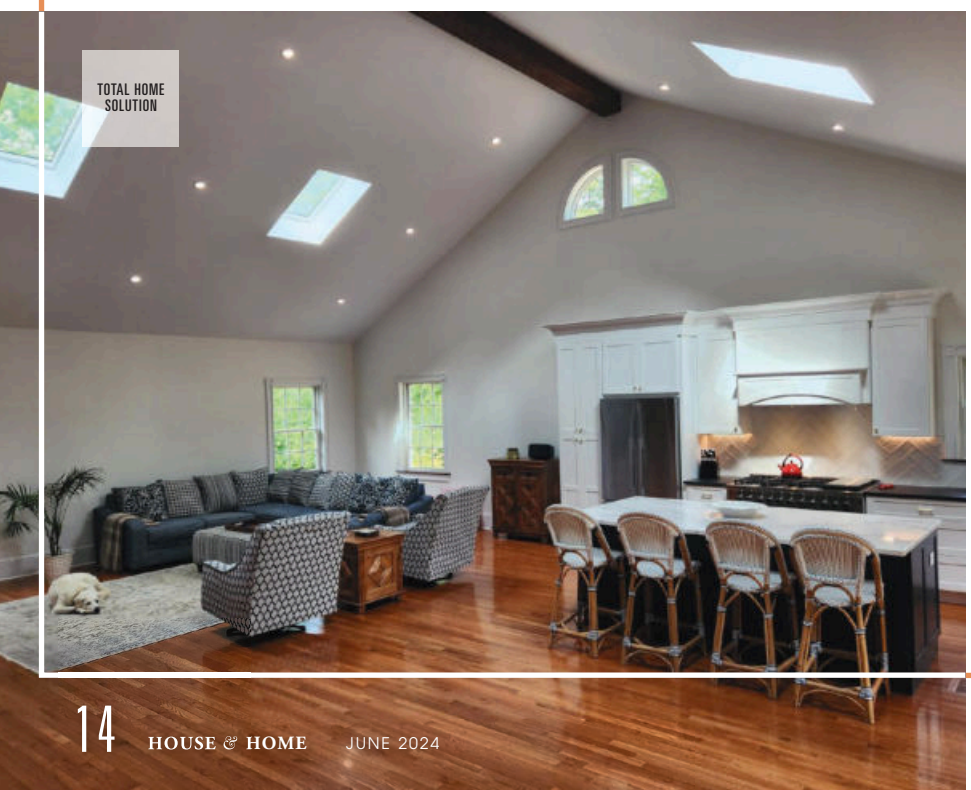
bit of a game plan before even giving us a call. That way, a vision is really understood by our salesmen and project managers," notes Jessica Jurisch, marketing manager at E&E General Contracting LLC.

Jurisch encourages those interested in a home addition to call sooner than later, as the permitting process is different in every area. Sometimes approvals take up to six weeks, and the entire build requires the collaboration of a permitting project manager, an engineer, an architect, the homeowner and the township. There's a lot involved in the process of a home addition, but those who go through it find it worth the time, planning and effort, as additions can suit any range of needs or desires, both practical and recreational.

"A very popular development is multigenerational living, so some type of in-law suite. We've been seeing a rise in that in the past few years or so," says Lee. "We've also seen a lot of conversions or additions based on specialty needs like saunas and gyms or she sheds. We've also seen a lot of spaces for hobbies or crafting, gaming rooms and man caves."

With the housing market especially difficult to afford or to navigate for young adults, that multigenerational living trend has also extended to creating expanded spaces for adult children to live at home and still have their space and privacy. Although additions take work, the result is a place that makes life easier by adding accessibility. Gehman has helped homeowners who want to stay in place as they age, so adding space to the first floor makes doing so safer.

"A first-floor bedroom, like a master suite, is almost more of an aging-in-place kind of thing. People who are getting older realize they like their house and neighborhood; they want to stay there, but getting on the stairs to the second-floor bedrooms is becoming more difficult. So, we've done a number of bedrooms and bathroom additions," he says.



Other pragmatic uses for an addition include a place for pets, an extra kitchen or a home office. It really depends on the unique personality of each household. The more personalized a project is, the more special it will become. That is just one of several benefits to adding space instead of moving to a larger home. Another is the cost comparison: Although construction for an addition is an investment, many feel that the aforementioned modern housing market is not worth the hassle of a transition.

"The benefits of adding space as opposed to moving are pretty obvious. First off, moving stinks. It's a lot of work. Leaving the home, neighborhood, and potentially schools that your family knows could be challenging and emotional. You know what you have with your home and you've put in a lot to get it to where it is today," affirms Brian Iwano, owner of Blue Tree Builders.

And if you decide to move in the future, additions benefit both property value and curb appeal. After all of the planning, permitting, construction and decorating, an addition will be advantageous due to its fulfillment of relaxation, convenience or entertainment; but it can also be profitable one day. Especially if equipped with the utilities or organizational structure for a walk-in closet or another bathroom, for example, the expansion will be

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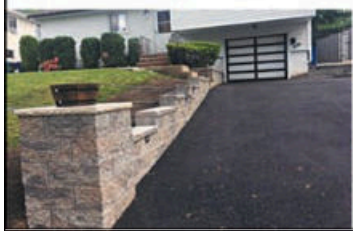
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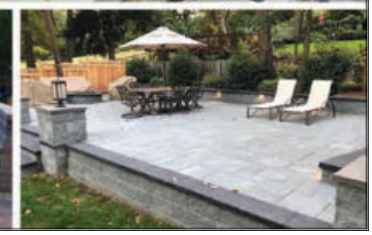
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a selling point when placed on the market.

"Depending on the type of addition that it is, you can generally see between like 50% and 80% return on investment. That's just in the current market, so who knows what that would be in a few years. Square footage is always a good choice when looking to add property value [especially] depending on what type of addition you're wanting to do. So, the most return on investment you're going to get is with a kitchen space," Jurisch explains.

If practicality isn't the ideal vision, a homeowner can still get a return on investment. The interior may be out-of-the-box customization to the extreme, but design-build companies are skilled at making the exterior match the original structure while making the entire house look better than before. Jurisch compares addition construction to a "mini house build," and recommends that homeowners treat it as such.

"Additions can increase curb appeal as these projects typically [require] significant exterior remodeling as well. During this process, it's the opportune time to make updates to siding, roofing, landscaping and other finishes that definitely help curb appeal," adds Iwano.

It is never too early to get started and to let ideas flow, no matter how inventive. There are so many renovation solutions to transform a space, but building from the ground up guarantees that every detail will fit household preferences. The finished product will be an evolution in enjoying everyday life, right at home. H&H

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In 2023, CLC came away with nine landscaping awards (six New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association awards and three New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association awards) with projects from all across the state, varying in sizes from $10,000 to $500,000.

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Montville Makeover

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This client wanted to feel a sense of pride when arriving home, or when others pass by, due to a colorful and lush planting design to enhance the curb appeal.

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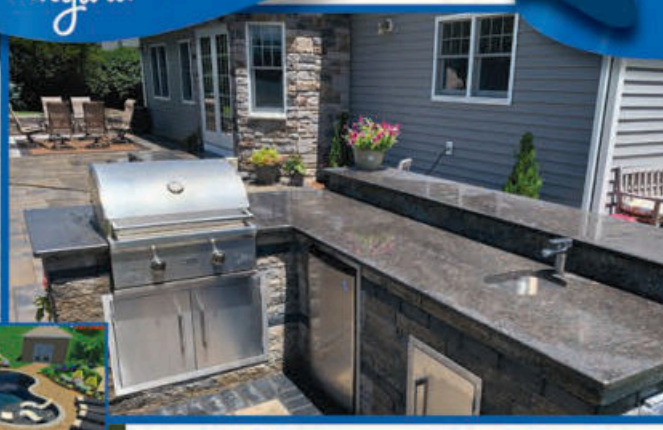
The Woodcliff Escape

This ambitious project creates an outdoor living space for the homeowner to spend all their free time in. The escape features a swimming pool, spa, multiple fire features, putting green and chipping mat, pavilion and an outdoor kitchen.

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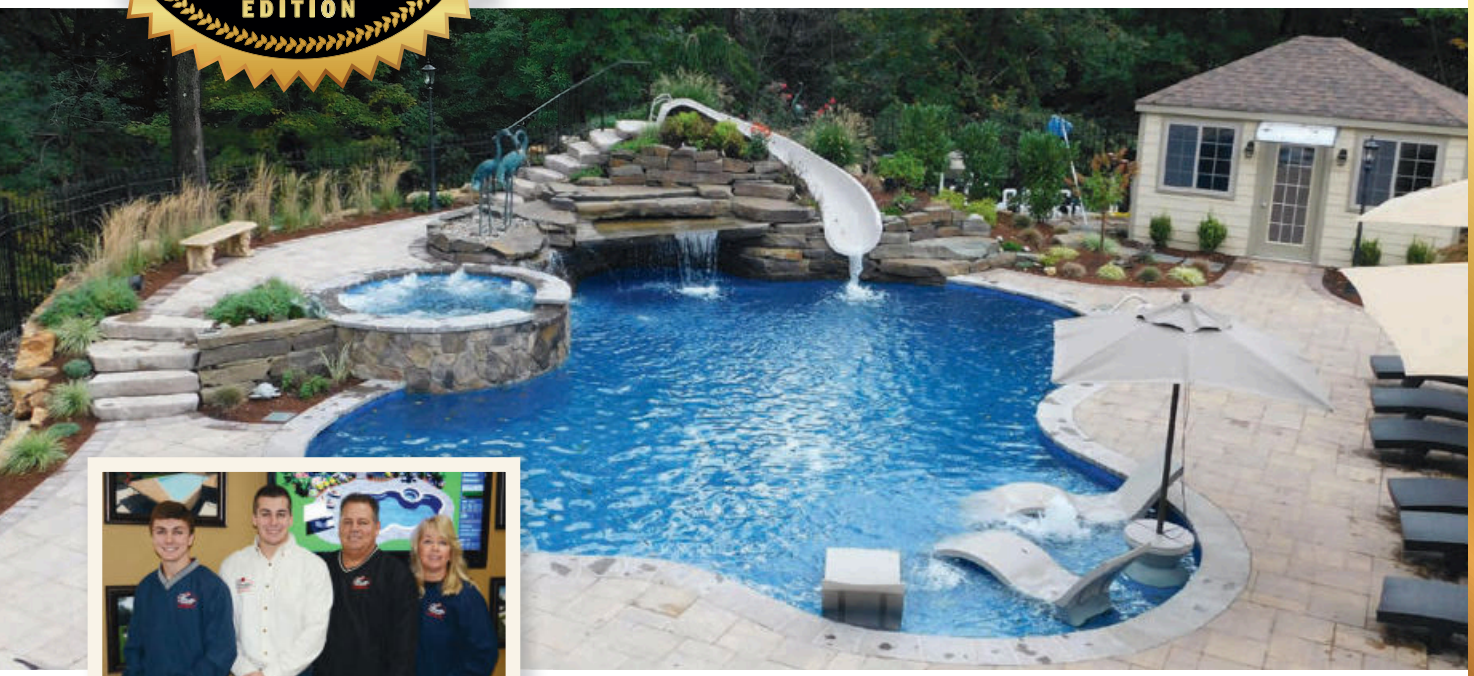
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—DON PANETTA, PRESIDENT/OWNER

This year you celebrate your 25th anniversary. What thoughts and emotions come to mind when you think about that?
It's hard to believe 25 years has gone that fast. We are so blessed that I have my two sons following in my footsteps. They will be third generation contractors.

What made you start the business?
To start, I had the best education and that was working with my father in his business for over 20 years. My wife and I ventured out on our own and created D. Panetta Contracting, LLC.

Where did you draw inspiration in order to start and build this incredible business?
I was inspired from my father. Growing up, contracting was in my blood.

What were your visions in when you started the business in 1999?
Our vision was to build and create beautiful landscape and hardscape to make our customers' dreams come true.

In what different ways have you grown over the years?
Our company has grown with education, technology and equipment.

What do you see as the biggest accomplishment since your start?
Our biggest accomplishments is satisfying our thousands of customers and bringing their dreams to life. My other biggest accomplishment is in watching my two sons grow in this business and make it better with 3D designs, and also outdoor lighting which shows a project before it is built and then with lights for bringing it to life at night.

What products/services do you currently offer that you think a homeowner values the most?
3D design showing the outdoor living area which consist of swimming pools, hardscape, landscape and lighting.

What is your favorite part of the job and what excites you the most?
My favorite part of the job is without a doubt meeting the customer for the first time, working through all the details, breaking ground and the finished project to see the look of joy and excitement on my customers face.

Where do you expect to go in the next 15 years? In what ways do you expect to continue to grow?
I can see our company continuing to grow overthe next 15 years. Working with my great team and expanding, the future is looking bright.

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H&H STONE

by Kristen Jorgensen



Choosing the Right Stone

Trends in kitchen countertops, backsplashes and flooring.

THE KITCHEN IS OFTEN CONSIDERED THE HEART OF THE HOME, and choosing the right materials for countertops, backsplashes and flooring can significantly impact its aesthetic appeal and functionality. In recent years, there have been exciting trends and developments in these areas, driven by advancements in material technology, evolving design preferences and a growing emphasis on sustainability. In this article, we dive into the latest trends with insight from local experts in our area and examine whether granite still reigns supreme, what's popular in colors and patterns, the evolution of backsplash choices and the latest options in kitchen flooring.

Countertops: Is Granite Still King?

For years, granite has been the go-to material for kitchen countertops, valued for its durability, heat resistance and natural beauty. However, recent trends suggest a shift in preferences. While granite remains a popular choice, it is no longer the undisputed king. That crown now goes to quartz, and our local experts agree with the masses.

"Quartz countertops have gained significant traction, offering a non-porous, low-maintenance alternative to natural stone. Unlike granite, which requires periodic sealing, quartz surfaces are highly resistant to stains, scratches and bacteria," shares David Cerami, president of HomeTech Renovations. "It also offers a uniform appearance, which appeals to those homeowners who might be looking for a sleek, modern look."

Another industry expert, Vic Fiore from Magnolia Home Remodeling Group, weighs in on the desirability of quartz. "Quartz's ability to mimic the appearance of natural stone, combined with its practical benefits, has made it a favorite among homeowners for many different kitchen designs and styles."

Backsplashes: Elevating Kitchen Design

Backsplashes have evolved from purely functional elements to key design features in the modern kitchen. They protect walls from spills and splashes, but they also offer a canvas for creativity, allowing homeowners to express their style. With a plethora of materials, colors and patterns available, backsplashes can transform the aesthetic of a kitchen.

Subway tiles have long been a staple in kitchen design, known for their simplicity and versatility. While the classic white subway tile remains popular, new variations are emerging that breathe fresh life into this timeless choice.

"We're still seeing the use of subway tiles, but with more personality in the design," offers Cerami. "Homeowners are selecting colored grouts or opting for more adventurous patterns of installation like herringbone or a staggered design."

Another option to jazz up a standard subway tile is selecting one with a textured surface or embossed patterns, offering a modern take on this classic look. Cerami elaborates: "Think tiles with a beveled edge, a wavy texture or a patterned surface. These tiles add dimension and visual interest to the backsplash without straying too far from tradition."

Another popular choice for a backsplash is large format tiles and slabs offering homeowners a seamless and sophisticated option.

These options provide a sleek, continuous look that enhances the overall aesthetic of the kitchen.

"The larger slabs are particularly appealing in minimalist and modern kitchen designs. Their clean lines and expansive surfaces contribute to a streamlined, uncluttered appearance that emphasizes simplicity and elegance," says Fiore. "And it's also great for those who want easy kitchen cleanup."

Kitchen Flooring: Trends and Considerations

When it comes to kitchen design, flooring plays a crucial role in setting the tone of the space. It's a high-traffic area that demands durability, ease of maintenance and, of course, aesthetic appeal. With myriad flooring options available, each with its own set of benefits and styles, selecting the right one for your kitchen can be both exciting and overwhelming.

Sophia Amiano, designer with Amiano & Son Design-Build, eagerly shares her insight on the latest trends within the industry.

"As a home remodeling designer, I'm thrilled to share the latest trends shaping our spaces. The design world today is all about embracing organic materials, raw textures and calming palettes," she says. "In kitchens and bathrooms, we're seeing a surge in linen-inspired tiles, basketweave mosaics, and classic black-and-white patterns. The modern farmhouse look has made way for tailored traditional designs with a rustic twist. Think rich wood tones, moody office spaces and playful laundry rooms."

Terrazzo and concrete floors are making a comeback, particularly in modern and industrial-style kitchens. Terrazzo, with its speckled appearance and diverse color options, adds a spirited yet sophisticated touch. Concrete floors, on the other hand, provide a sleek, minimalist look that complements contemporary designs. Both materials are highly durable and can be customized with different finishes and treatments.

Engineered wood flooring is also still popular, combining the beauty of hardwood with improved durability. It consists of a top layer of real wood veneer over a plywood or high-density fiberboard (HDF) core, which makes it more stable and less prone to warping than solid wood.

"For kitchen flooring, many homeowners are choosing warm wood to extend the cozy feel throughout their most-used spaces," says Amiano. "Additionally, concrete-inspired, sleek patterned tiles are becoming a highly sought-after look in contemporary kitchens. To add a personal touch or a dash of whimsy, incorporating fun, bold colors in select areas can bring a delightful pop and invigorate the overall design, making each space uniquely yours."

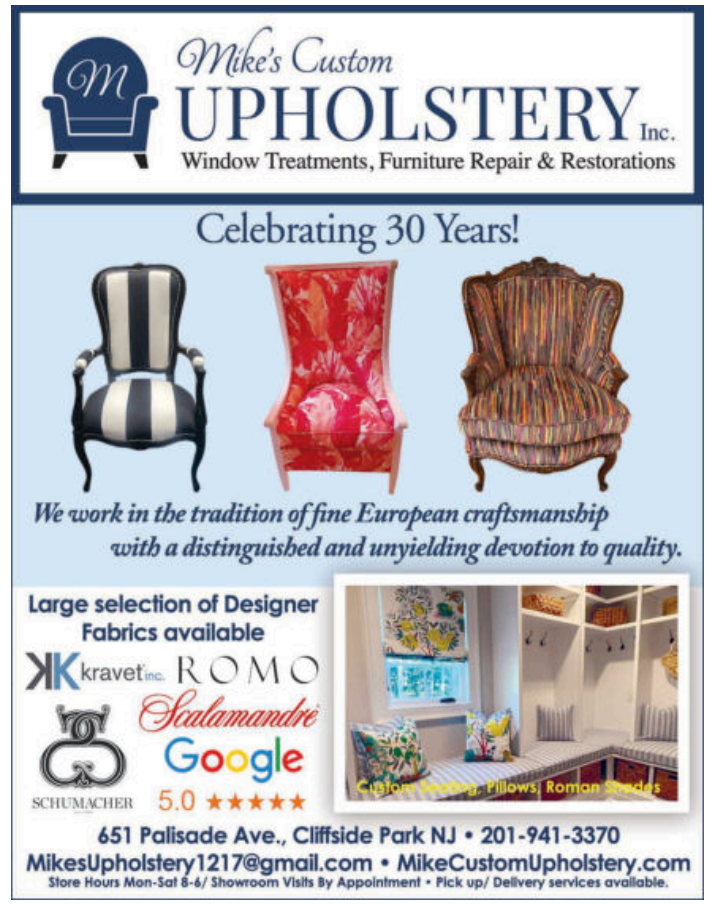
Ultimately, choosing the right stone and flooring for your kitchen depends on your personal style, practical needs and the overall design vision for your space. By staying informed about the latest trends and innovations, you can create a kitchen that is not only functional but also a beautiful reflection of your taste and personality. **H&H**

RESOURCES

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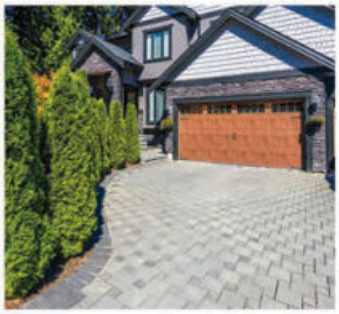
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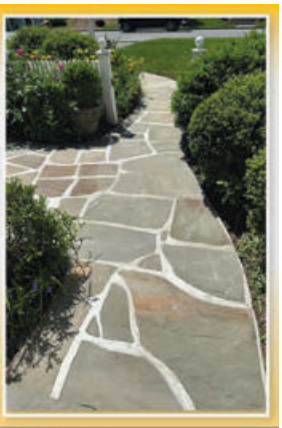
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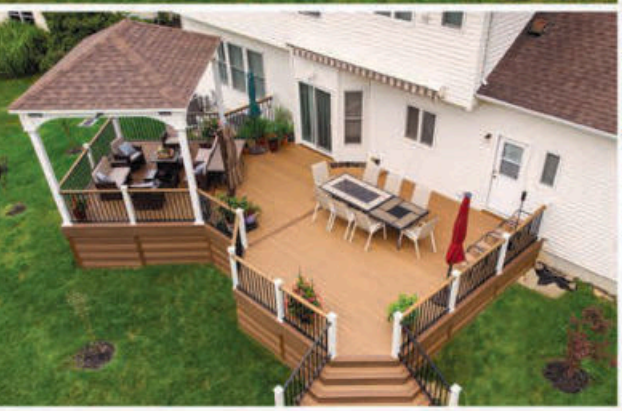
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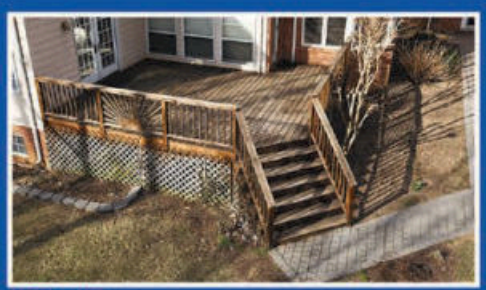




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