Best of HOUSE&HOME

Volume 22, Issue 2
North Jersey



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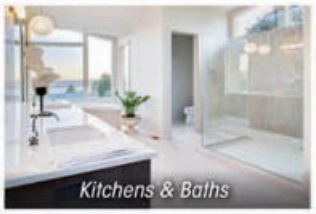
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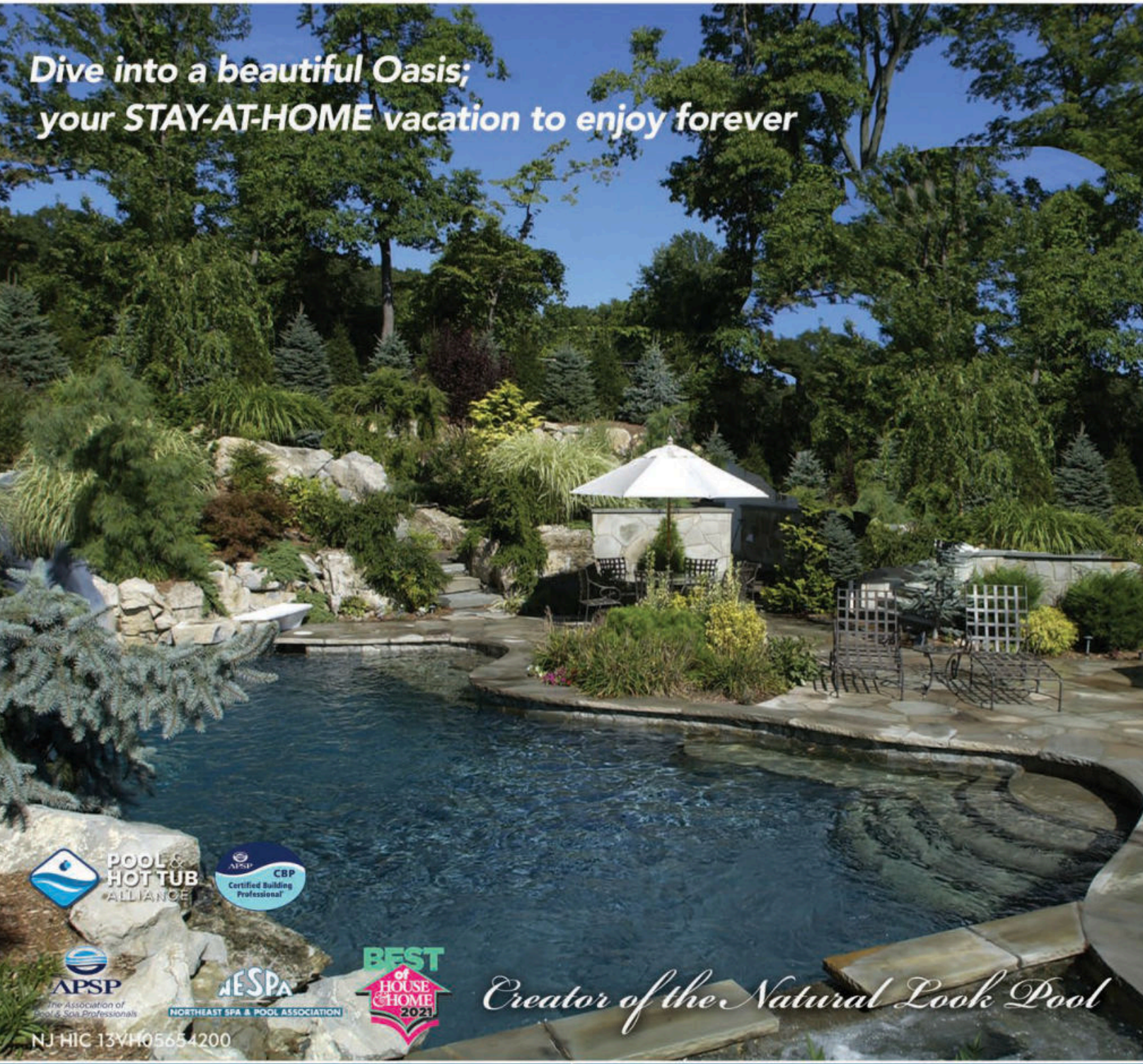
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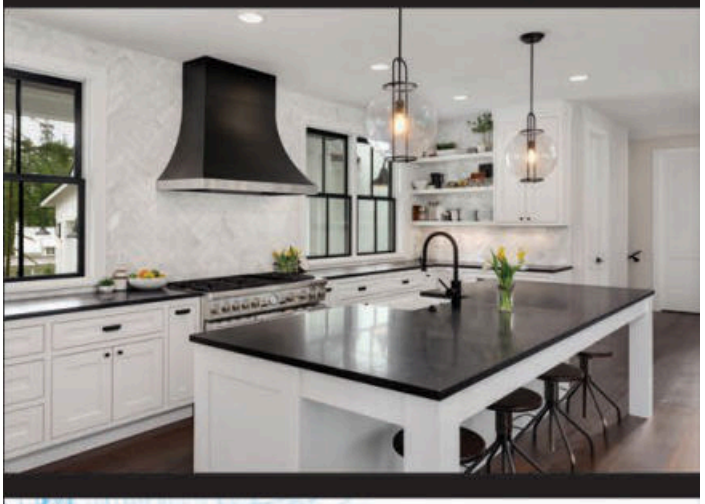
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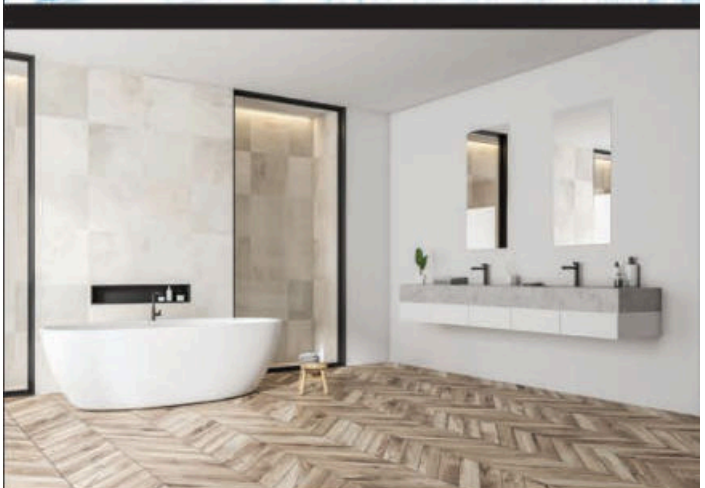


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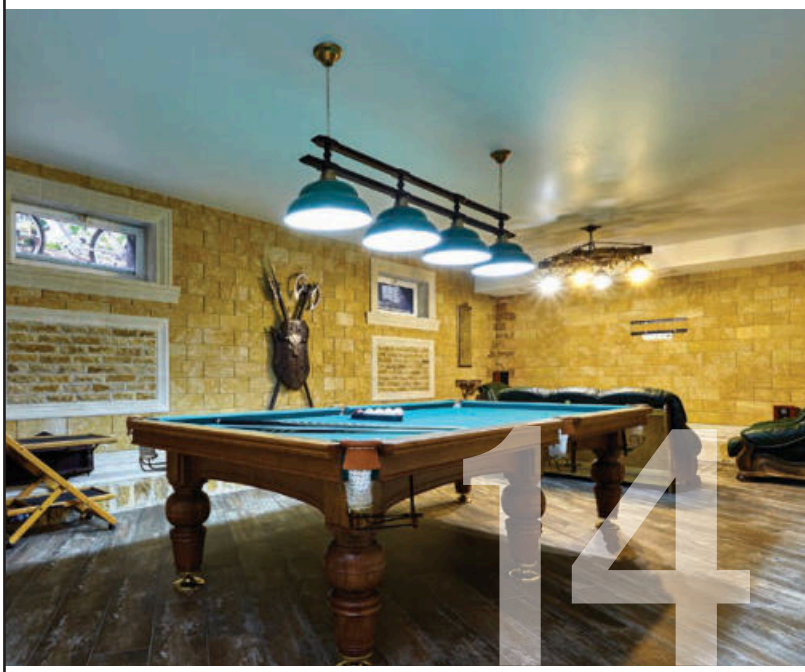
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Colonial Generators helps homeowners and businesses eliminate the stress, inconvenience and cost associated with losing power

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GTFM Design & Build offers a wide variety of renovation services while stressing integrity and respect for the homeowner



On the cover:
Nothing disrupts life like a power outage. With a whole-home generator from Colonial Generators, homeowners don't have to worry about the stress and inconvenience of being without power. To find out more about how these systems work and why they are worth the investment, turn to page 27.
Cover image courtesy of Colonial Generators

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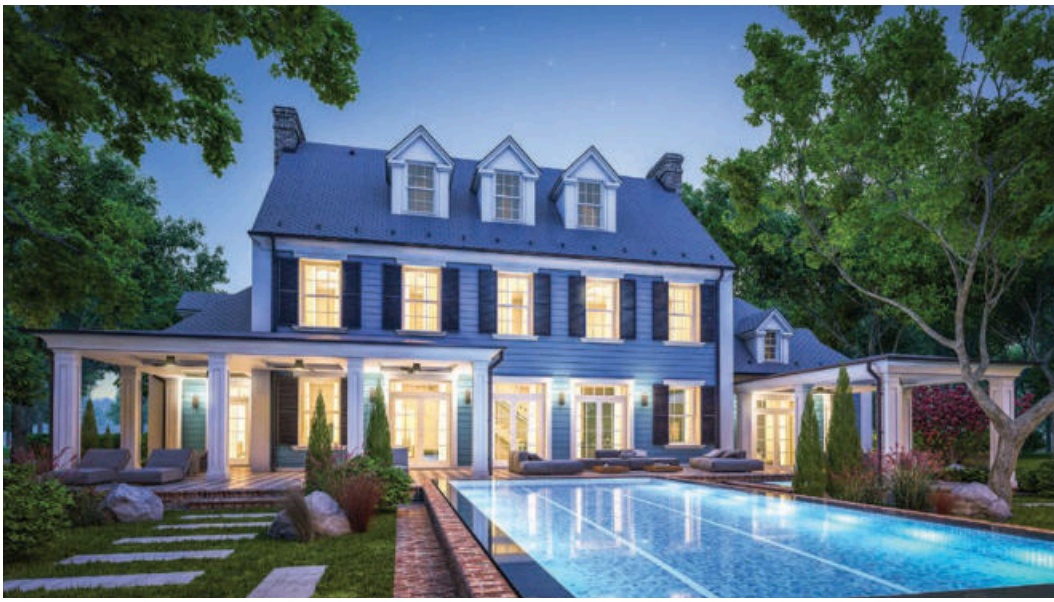
We are excited to present our seventh annual

Best of House & Home.

As voted by our readers, the following companies and professionals are being recognized for their quality products, expertise, top-notch customer service and reliability. We're also featuring a closer look at these companies in informative spotlights that shed some light on their dedication. For your next home project, there is no one better than these winners.



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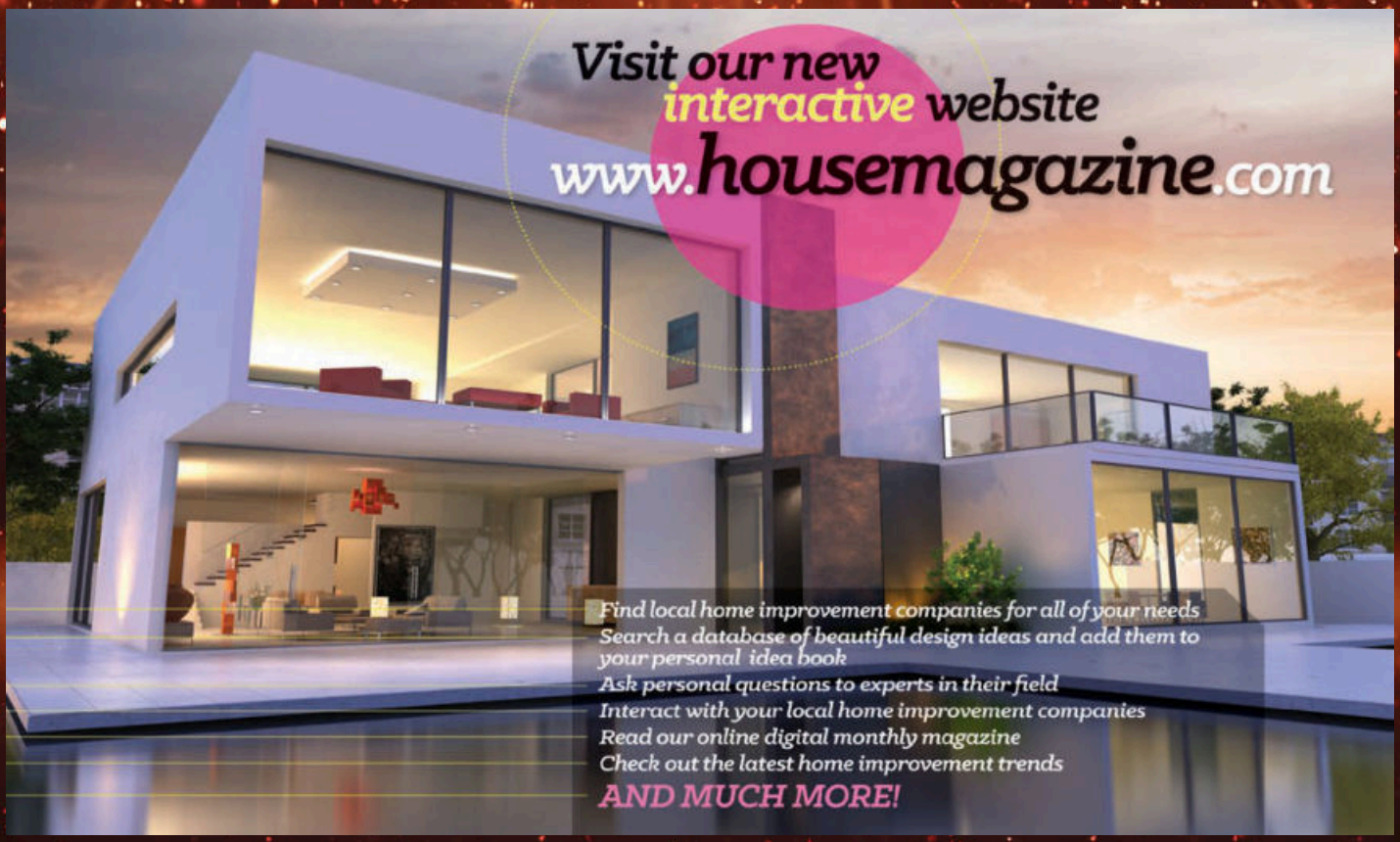
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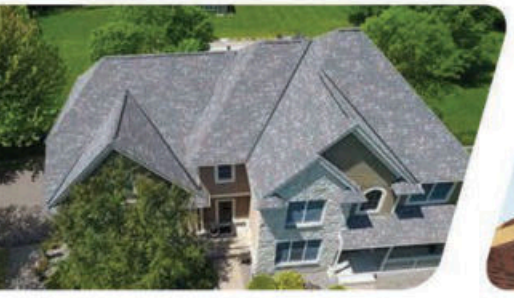
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A finished basement can add valuable space to a home, but there are several important steps to take during the remodeling process.



UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

BY MATT COSENTINO



Even the closest of families sometimes need a little bit of time apart from one another. Whether it's young kids craving a dedicated room to play in, teenagers looking to hang out with friends, or adults requiring a home office to work in peace and quiet, finding the space can be difficult. More and more homeowners are looking downstairs to solve the dilemma.

Finishing a basement to create extra living space has always been popular, but since the pandemic struck and families were stuck at home more often, this type of remodeling project has become even more in demand. In fact, local contractors have seen a significant rise in requests over the past 20 months.

"Once the kitchen and baths are done, the basement is always next on the list, especially for a family," says Dan Dilworth of Dilworth's Custom Design. "It makes sense to finish off the basement and make it another living space, even if you only use it while the kids are at home."

Dennis Gehman of Gehman Design Remodeling starts a basement renovation the same way he does every project: by having an extensive conversation with the clients to discover exactly what they're looking to accomplish so he and his team can come up with the appropriate plan.

"Initially you have to ask the question, 'What do you want to use this space for?'" he says. "If it's a playroom for the kids, then all we need is drywall on the walls, a few lights in the ceiling, carpet on the floor and then we can paint the room and it's ready. But if it's a home office area, a home theater, a workout area or a bar, [it gets more complicated]. We've done them where it's basically a whole other house with a kitchen, a laundry, a bedroom, all those types of things."





No matter what the space is going to be used for, there are important precautions that must be taken even before the design is considered or construction can begin. *House & Home* spoke to several area professionals to learn more about these steps along with design trends and creative solutions to common issues.

STARTING THE PROCESS

After the decision has been made to finish the basement and the contractor has been hired, one of the very first concerns is addressing any mildew or moisture issues. Hurricane Ida recently served as a reminder that serious storms have become more frequent in this area, and water damage can have major implications regarding such an expensive investment.

According to Todd Prosan of '58 Foundations, groundwater problems are more prevalent in older homes, but leaks can happen anywhere.

"Through our 63 years in business, we've worked with many builders and had to have fixed thousands of leaky basements in homes under a year old," he says.

"The best time to waterproof the basement is before finishing it—even if it's precautionary. There are less expensive ways to prepare a basement ahead of finishing it that can be added to later at a lesser cost if a water problem presents itself. If there is a water problem, identifying the source of the problem and the solution comes from our years of experience, training, plus working with the homeowner—asking lots of questions and together creating a custom solution that fits what they are trying to accomplish in their home."

Kevin McCormack of McCormack Construction has completed many basement remodels and says the winter is a particularly busy time for such a project. Assessing any moisture issues is always one of his first priorities.

"You look around at the basement and see if there's been a history of seepage of water or direct water coming in through the wall," he says. "A lot of times that can be corrected from the exterior because the grade is sloping to the foundation and when it rains the water is collecting there. So you can change the grade by lifting it up with some soil and pitching it away from the house. That's the simple way to do it.

"It also might be a combination of doing that and waterproofing the basement by putting a French drain in around the perimeter before you do the remodel. If there's any sign that water has been there … it's silly to put in a remodel without putting a drain around the building and a sump pump. That would be a major mistake. You have to put a good plan together."

In addition to waterproofing, it also makes sense to examine the foundation before the renovations are started.


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"While we're asking questions of the homeowner to better understand the home, we do a thorough interior and exterior inspection of the entire foundation," Prosan says. "Besides waterproofing, we provide foundation settlement and wall solutions. Many hairline cracks in poured concrete floors and vertical cracks in walls occur during the concrete curing phase when the house is first built. As long as these cracks aren't leaking or getting wider, they are probably fine to leave alone. If cracks leak, we can seal them. If they are expanding, are horizontal on the wall, or stair-step shaped in concrete block walls, this can be a sign of a potential foundation settling problem or external pressure problem on the walls. For either of these issues, structural supports may be necessary."

OTHER IMPORTANT STEPS

Once the moisture issues have been resolved, that doesn't mean the homeowner is in the clear just yet. There are other significant conversations to be had.

"The next big thing to think about is egress, especially if you're putting a bedroom down there," Dilworth says. "Some townships want an egress no matter what, in any enclosed space. That's basically a window of a certain minimal size or a door to get outside in case of emergency."

A Bilco door is a common method for egress, but there are some houses where adding a door or window is not possible because of the way the structure is situated. In those cases, Dilworth adds, the client may have to adjust plans for the space.

HVAC is another item to be checked off the list, but according to Gehman, that's not always as easy as some homeowners expect.

"Most people say they'll just tie into the existing HVAC, but generally speaking we are unable to do that because the existing unit was sized for a certain square feet of living space," he explains. "Let's say it's a two-story house and it has one HVAC unit; if we finish the whole basement we're basically adding 50% more space, and the one unit is not going to be enough."

Reuben Stoltzfus of EWBN believes this is where the expertise of an experienced contractor comes into play. "One of the most important aspects with your HVAC is knowing the system can handle the space," he says. "If it's too small there will be temperature issues and if it's too large, it is money wasted. Understanding and having familiarity with township regulations is key, especially when it comes to the timing of the project."

McCormack points out that because most basements usually don't get too cold or too hot, there are multiple options to consider. Air conditioning might not even be necessary.

"The good thing about a basement is most of it is in the ground, so you're already insulated by the earth," he says. "In an attic, forget it, it's blazing hot up there. But the basement stays kind of cool so you don't really need air conditioning, and you can use other sources of heat without spending a lot of money. Not that I recommend electric heat, but you might only need a couple of sections which is very simple and you can put it on its own thermostat. Or you can do another boiler or a heat pump that does heating and air conditioning."

GETTING CREATIVE

Many basements have odd space configurations or elements that may not be a factor in other rooms in the house. Designers often take pleasure in using their creative side to come up with interesting solutions.

"The CAD [computer-aided design] program that we use is designed for kitchens and baths, but we can also use it for any room in the house, including the basement," Dilworth says. "We can put the walls anywhere we want: around support poles, around sump pumps, around strange structural configurations with the exterior cinderblock walls and stuff like that. … All of that can [be resolved] through the CAD system and you can draw it up as detailed as you want. … There are limitations of course, but at the same time, in the

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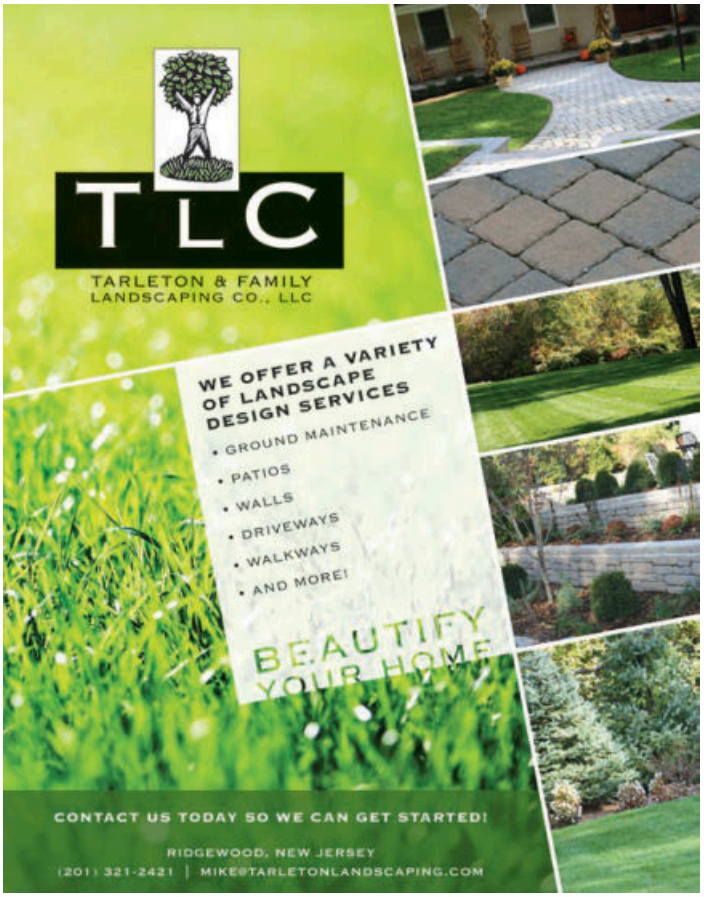
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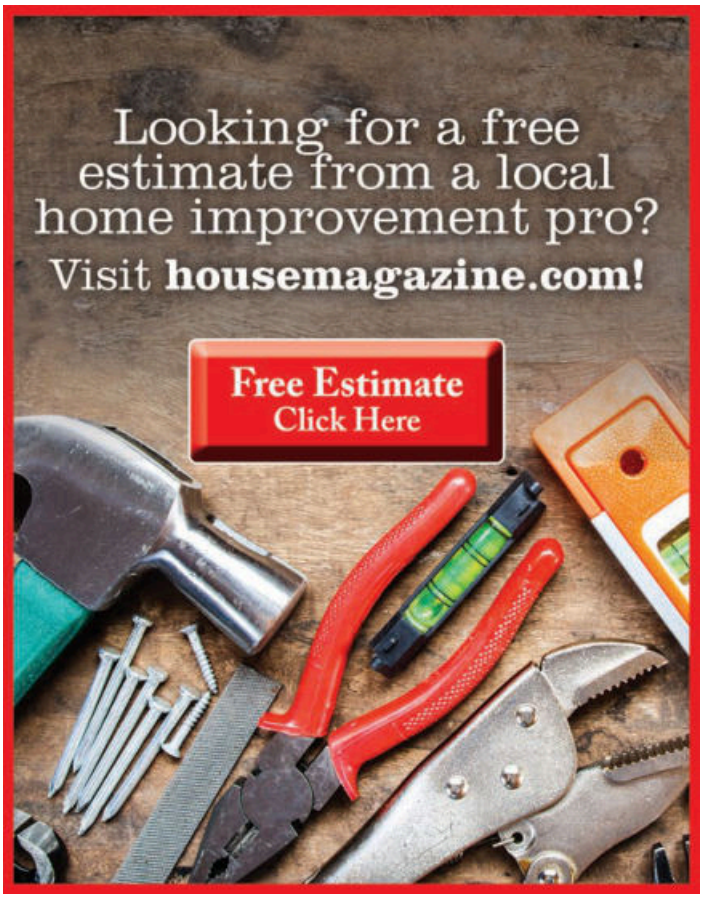
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UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

digital age you can draw just about anything."

Certain basements come with their fair share of challenges, but these idiosyncrasies can also make the space unique and something that stands out to friends and family.

"Sometimes, odd spaces can become a conversation piece," Stoltzfus says. "For example, last fall we did one basement remodel where the space under the stairs was converted to a kids' cave, which was an instant favorite with our clients' children. Other times, we have used custom cabinetry to fit the space and everyone could always use extra storage space. When creativity is needed, that is when projects become more fun, not just for me, but also the crew."

McCormack and Gehman have both been part of projects where lally columns were hidden in walls, turned into decorative aspects or even relocated.

"Sometimes there's a space that makes sense to put the big-screen TV and the seating, but you've got one or two columns in the way," Gehman says. "Most of the time people just work with them, but sometimes it makes sense and they're willing to spend the money for us to do some structural engineering to figure out a way to get those columns out of there. People ask us, 'Can you do that?' Well, bridges are made of beams and typically there's not a column coming down in the middle of it, so it can be done. But it's time and money and unfortunately both of those are limited resources."

THE END RESULT

Like any renovation project, a finished basement has obstacles to overcome, but when all is said and done most homeowners are thrilled with the extra living space they have added to their homes.

"One of the things we'll hear is, 'I'm sorry I didn't do this sooner. I don't know why I waited so long, I could have used this space even more when the kids were younger,'" McCormack says. "Or clients will say, 'I'm glad I have this space now away from family members where I can concentrate on my work more or have my man cave.' Everybody has a different angle and everybody is appreciative of our work because we're very detail oriented."

Stoltzfus and his team are just as pleased as the clients when they can deliver on their promises for the space.

"We get a lot of wows," he says. "No one ever anticipates the final look being as great at it is. It is the most joyful reaction and it brings our entire team so much satisfaction knowing the customer is a happy one." H&H

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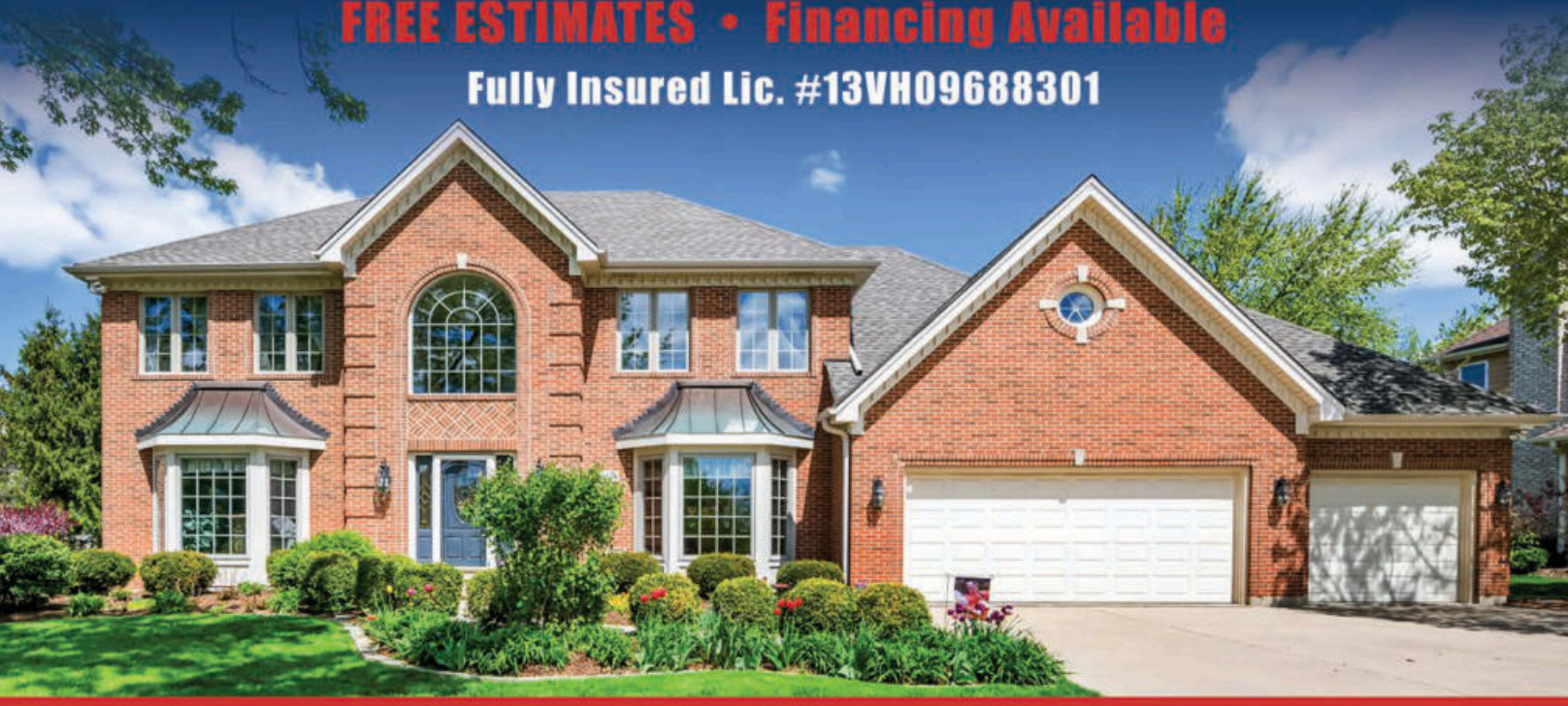
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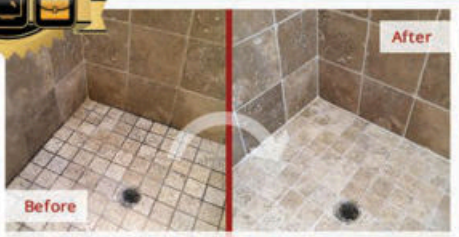
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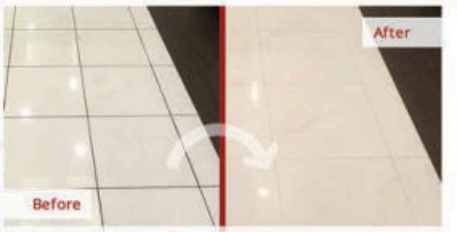
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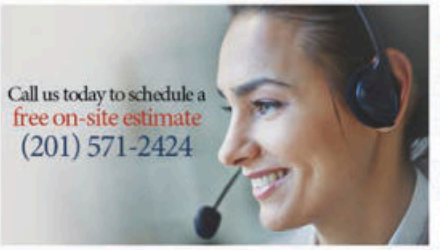
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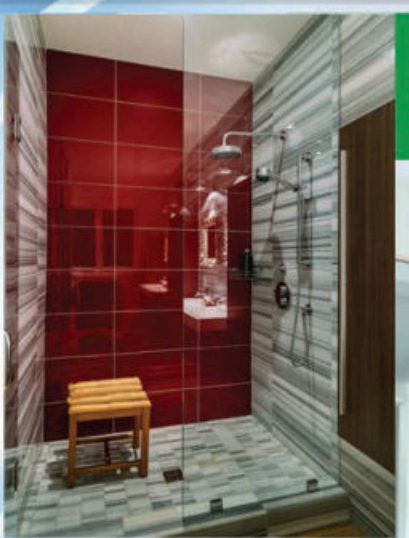
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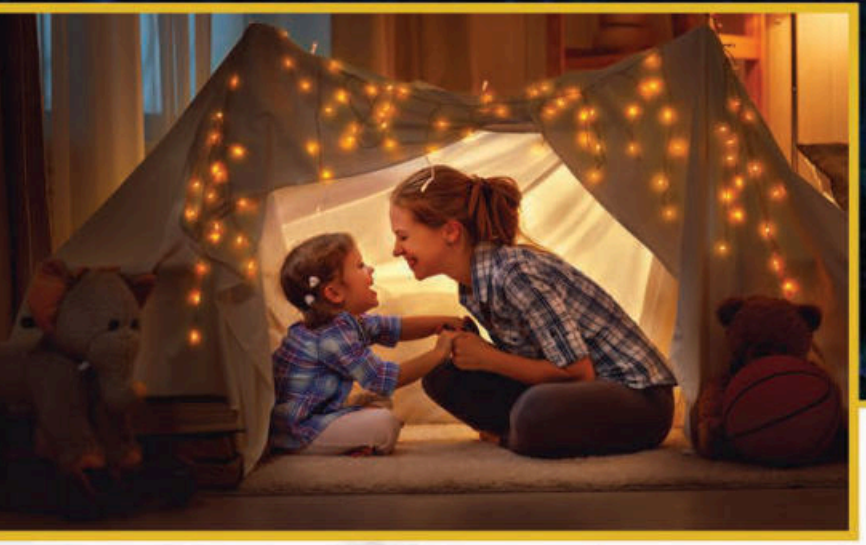
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Generating Peace of Mind

Colonial Generators helps homeowners and businesses eliminate the stress, inconvenience and cost associated with losing power.



Photography courtesy of Colonial Generators

Almost every aspect of American life depends on uninterrupted power. When the power goes out, even for a short time, it can be incredibly inconvenient, unnerving and even dangerous.

For a young mother of twins in Delaware County, a power outage that lasted four days following a severe storm left her feeling helpless and stressed. At the time, her twin girls were only newborns. After that experience, she began looking into options for whole-home power generators. She felt fortunate to have found Colonial Generators. Having recently moved, she says she is planning to have Colonial install a home generator once again. She simply cannot imagine living without one anymore.

"In the area that we previously lived, we lost power frequently—as often as two or three times each month, largely because of all the trees around us," says the homeowner, who asked to remain anonymous. "Even if it was just a few hours, it was hard with new babies. Heating formula or even just keeping the house warm were suddenly stressors I had to think about."

After having the home generator installed, the homeowner says she never even noticed when the power went out in her area. Backup power would kick on so quickly, so it seemed as though nothing had even happened.

That's exactly what a whole-home generator is meant to do, according to Nikos Papadopoulos, president of Colonial Generators. When a home loses power, an automatic transfer switch shifts immediately to the standby generator. Only a few seconds pass between the power going off and then kicking back on—like a "quick blip," Papadopoulos says.

Although Papadopoulos says the trend toward whole-home generators remains in its infancy—approximately 5% of homes have full backup power, he estimates—the need continues to increase. The COVID-19 pandemic, in which people spent more time than ever at home, has made this need quite clear. When unnerved homeowners were stuck home with no power, Colonial Generators received a significant uptick in calls and requests for price quotes.

"As people experienced power outages in the midst of being stuck at home during this pandemic, I think the need to have power at all times really emerged," Papadopoulos says. "Homeowners were stocking up on food and had freezers full of meat. There was a lot to be lost if the power went out for too long."

Likewise, generators have equipped many businesses with essential backup power. Local restaurants are a fine example. Restaurateurs who were already coping with razor-thin margins even prior to the pandemic certainly cannot afford to throw away any food due to power outages and other preventable disruptions.

With the need rising, Papadopoulos believes home generators will become an increasingly important part of America's future. He equates it to the comforts of heating and air conditioning, once considered an indulgence that has become a necessity most people cannot imagine doing without.

"We believe in the not-too-distant future that whole-home generators are going to become a standard part of homeowners' lifestyles," he adds. "There are many different benefits to having backup power, and we all want to have life uninterrupted. With people at home more than ever, the need will only grow."

Of course, he suggests homeowners should carefully vet providers when selecting a professional to install and maintain their generator. With the "newness" surrounding this market, some inexperienced providers have jumped into the fray. The benefit to choosing a provider such as Colonial Generators is that the company focuses solely on generators.

Worth the Investment

Colonial Generators has the specialized expertise needed to sell, install and service generators for homes and businesses. Papadopoulos considers this an important point, adding that no one can afford to be left "in limbo" if something goes wrong and no one is available to fix the problem.

"For some people, especially the elderly or those with medical needs, losing power is more than an inconvenience," he says. "For some, losing power can be really serious. It's important you get a whole-home generator from a reputable company that can also service their work."

To his point, the decision often comes down to peace of mind. Going without power for any amount of time can be frustrating. And for the young Delaware County mother referenced earlier in this story, having babies at home without power has the potential to cause unwanted stress. Now, she considers a whole-house generator nothing less than a necessity.

"It's an investment, but it's worth it," she says. "While they have small generators that you can buy yourself and will give you some power, once you've experienced whole-house power like this, it's really hard to imagine living without it."

Papadopoulos says he's thrilled to be able to make this service available to homeowners and business owners. Also, because Colonial Generators offers financing plans, whole-home generators are more affordable than ever.

"As an owner, I'm just really excited about what whole-home generators can do for people," he adds. "It's a solution for homeowners who not only want to avoid inconveniences to their lifestyle but who want to have comfort knowing that they won't lose food or heat or even medical supplies or baby formula that needs refrigeration.

"This is a solution that will give people peace of mind," he continues. "And for many, that's invaluable." H&H

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Manufacturers are responding to the demand for automation around the home with innovative products that make life easier.



SMARTER THAN YOUR AVERAGE HOME

Kids these days don't know how good they have it. Thanks to the prevalence of smart technology, they can just shout out the name of a song and voila, a nearby smart speaker starts playing it. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. Thermostats, blinds and shades, doorbells and even faucets are among the latest products to get "smart" as manufacturers respond to the never-ending demand for automation around the home, and with more millennials becoming homeowners, they will likely drive this exposure higher.

"If you can dream it, we can make it smart," says Andrew Sherman of Sound Advice & Video. "More and more devices are becoming available within this smart home ecosystem; everything from dishwashers to coffee machines to doorbells and locks are smart ready. You can now control all these devices via an app on your phone or even by your voice."

We asked some local professionals to highlight a few of the best items to make "smarter" around your home.

WINDOW TREATMENTS

Believe it or not, motorized window treatments have been around for over two decades. "When I first came into the industry over 20 years ago, motorized window treatments were a very forward-thinking option," says Laura Hawley, president and owner of Ambiance Design Window Treatments. "I served in a role that was focused on those options."

However, the technology has come a long way. "It was expensive and mostly infrared with a clunky, unreliable remote control," she says. "Now they are tied to a smartphone and can even be set to a specific schedule to open with your morning alarm or, based on the temperature in the house, closed to help conserve energy."

Opening and closing window treatments with the touch of a button has its advantages for those with dexterity issues, whether related to aging or a disease. Hawley knows of a client with ALS who says the smart functionality of motorized window treatments has changed her life. "There are also some safety concerns around traditional blinds with strings and children. Motorization removes those hazards," she adds.

Ambiance Design offers Hunter Douglas products, and Hawley says every product, including shutters, can be motorized. "Hunter Douglas is a leader in the design world and well-known for their beautiful products that meet homeowners' sophisticated needs and functionality."

FAUCETS

Kitchens and baths have seen a big technological jump recently and Moen is one brand embracing the smart trend, says Matt Mann, of Bellmawr Plumbing Supply. "Moen has several products—smart faucets, shower systems and the Moen Flo water monitoring system—that are going to become more popular in the coming years," he says.

First, the Moen Flo is a device installed off your water main and connected to your phone's Bluetooth. "It monitors the water pressure throughout the house and if there is a leak or sign of a drop in water pressure, the system sends a message to your phone and shuts off the water from the main so the leak stops. It's a nice security feature if you're on vacation or for your vacation home so you can rest assured your house isn't flooding," he says. "It can also save money on homeowners' insurance because they will see less of a threat from water damage."

When it comes to smart faucets, Mann feels Moen's products are the nicest. "Moen took the idea of Siri from Apple and incorporated it into the faucet so it's completely operable by voice. You can ask it to dispense exactly 8 ounces or whatever amount you need, and at an exact temperature," he says. For example, any parent would appreciate being able to fill a baby's bottle with the perfect temperature of water and completely take out the step of warming a bottle of formula.

On some of Moen's smart faucets, there is even an option for handwashing in which


MOEN

the water shuts off for 20 seconds while the person lathers up before automatically turning back on for rinsing.

Mann also says Moen's smart shower system can preheat the water so it's ready to go when you wake up in the morning, and it can be programmed for different users not only for preferred temperature but also for the shower head functions and sprays.

In five to 10 years, Mann believes these products will be the norm in kitchen and bath design. "In the future for my industry, I see every appliance—washers, dryers, dishwashers, stoves—all being controlled by phone app. Individual companies are starting to do it, but I think it will all be integrated," he says. "Eventually we're not going to need to touch anything with our hands around the home."

SECURITY

Whether for your primary home or a vacation property, some level of security is necessary. "Our market is full of secondary homeowners, so we see a lot of requests regarding HVAC control as well as surveillance. By incorporating smart thermostats and video doorbells our clients can now control their heat and AC as well as check the front door for any package deliveries," says Sherman.

It can also come in handy for those forgetful moments. "Most smart home devices come with a compatible app which allows for push notifications and two-way feedback/control. Gone are the days of worrying about if you locked the front door. Now you can open up your app, check to see if the door is locked or lock it if necessary. Notifications work in a similar way, when someone unlocks the door, or turns off the security system you will receive a notification to your device of this change."

These systems might seem DIY-friendly, but there are benefits to having them professionally installed, he continues.

"It's always beneficial to look at contracting a smart home installer compared to DIY. Not only do we have experience and an understanding of the products and their set-up needs, we are always just a phone call away for tech support or troubleshooting. When a DIY system goes down you are often required to contact the tech support department of said device which can relate to hours of time spent on hold or waiting for the correct specialist. Whereas we are a quick phone call with the ability to send a tech for an onsite visit," says Sherman. H&H

RESOURCES

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AmbianceDesign.biz

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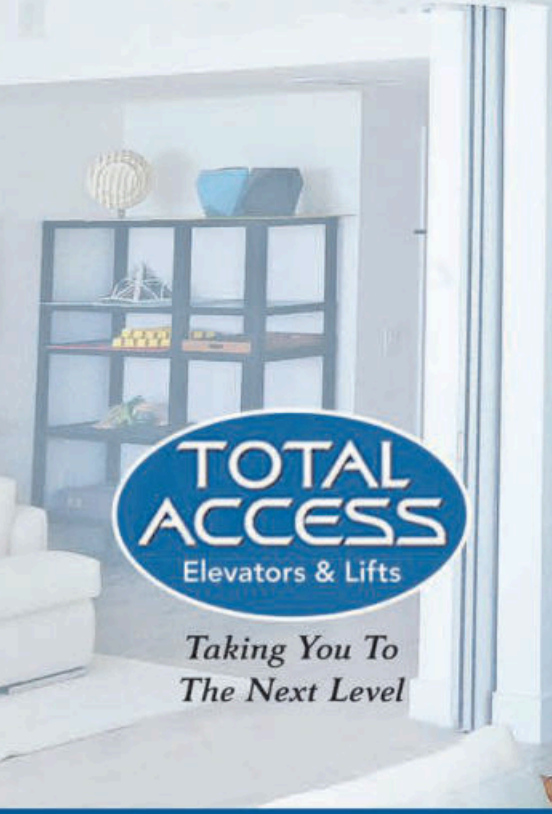
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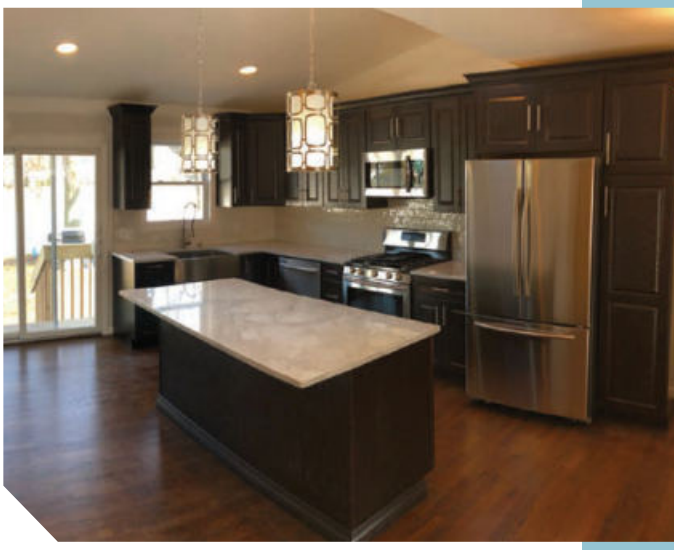
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Ask any of the thousands of clients who have trusted GTFM Design & Build to transform their homes over the years, and they are sure to rave about the aesthetic value and functionality that came out of their addition, kitchen remodel or bathroom renovation. But perhaps even more important than the end result is the way they were treated and the respect they were given throughout the process.

"Trust and honesty are the foundation upon which our company is built," says Rick Mawker, owner of GTFM. "We are 100% transparent with our customers from start to finish. Establishing a good relationship between contractor and homeowner, with open and timely communication, is imperative to us. All of our customers meet with me personally before the start of their jobs, and on a regular basis until the project is complete."

Conducting business with integrity has been paramount to Mawker throughout his nearly four decades in the construction industry. Thirty of those years have been at GTFM, which he became sole owner of 15 years ago. Although Mawker has no plans of stepping aside from a career he is passionate about anytime soon, when that day does come he is confident the company will continue to thrive thanks to the culture and family bonds that form the backbone of the organization.

"Family owned and operated, I proudly run this company with my amazing staff and the tireless efforts of my two sons, Richard Jr. and Stephen, who are the core members of the GTFM production team," he says. "It's certainly rewarding to work with them every day. I get nothing but praise from our homeowners, who absolutely love working with my kids. They take great care of all of our clients."

Offering a wide range of services and projects of all sizes, GTFM handles every aspect of the job from conceptualization to completion, including permits and inspections. The company is fully insured and only works with other vendors who are fully insured. Financing is available and clients also receive one of the most competitive warranty packages in the industry.

Collaboration is stressed throughout the design process, as design consultants Steve, Gary and Richard work in concert with a talented and affordable architect, providing a full set of detailed plans based on exactly what the homeowner wants. Conceptual drawings by June, the company's on-staff artist, ensure that the client has a clear picture of what to expect.

"Being a good listener is crucial to the success of our business and the satisfaction of our customers," Mawker says. "We are eager to understand the needs of our customers, listen to new ideas and share our many years of experience on what works and what doesn't. In addition, it is imperative that we create something that not only works for the customer's lifestyle, but also and equally important, stays within their budget. We are practical and honest, and if there is something that just isn't in the customer's budget, we will tell them that too, but not before we explore every possible option."

GTFM has only become stronger as a result of the pandemic and has been able to retain its entire staff throughout the crisis. While some companies have been impacted by soaring lumber prices and shortages on supplies, its long-standing relationships with vendors across the state have enabled it to finish all projects on time and within budget.

And it's a good thing, too, because home improvements have been in demand. Mawker says multi-generational homes are on the rise as extended families are living together more often for various reasons. Home offices are becoming must-haves with many people working remotely, and clients are also seeking outdoor living spaces such as porches, decks, pool houses or cabanas.

Kitchen and bath remodels never go out of style, and recent trends include bold pops of color, the use of mixed materials and pull-out drawers for appliances. As a certified dealer for MasterBrand and Schrock cabinets, GTFM can pass on its dealer discount to customers.

Whether it's a brand-new kitchen, a sunroom off the back of the house or even a second level of the home that GTFM is building, when the team is able to understand the client's vision and deliver a space they will enjoy for years, there is no better feeling.

"It's extremely rewarding to complete a project that many times exceeds the expectations of our clients," Mawker says. "Nothing speaks more to the satisfaction of our customers than our returning customers, of which we have many. Second to our returning customers are those customers who proudly recommend us to their closest family and friends. Having been in business for 30 years, much of our business comes from word of mouth, and that would not be the case if we did not have so many delighted homeowners recommending us." H&H

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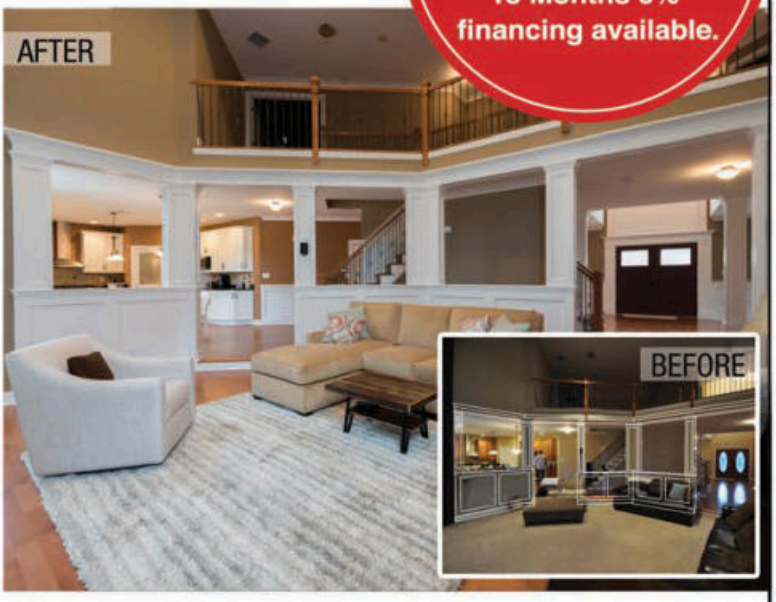
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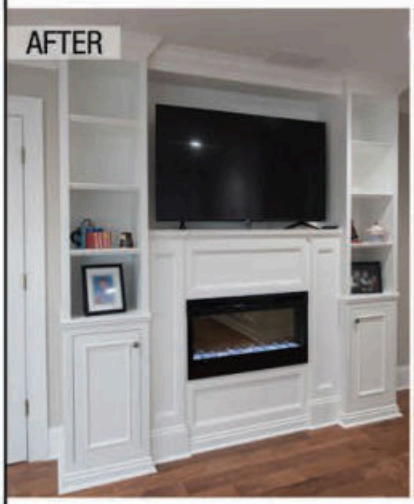
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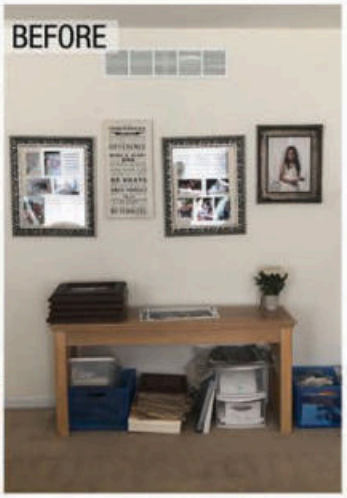


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