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Colonial Marble & Granite

Adapting to rising demand with unprecedented investments in safety and technology

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Front and Center

Fireplaces are catching on as the focal point of homes

Getting Ahead

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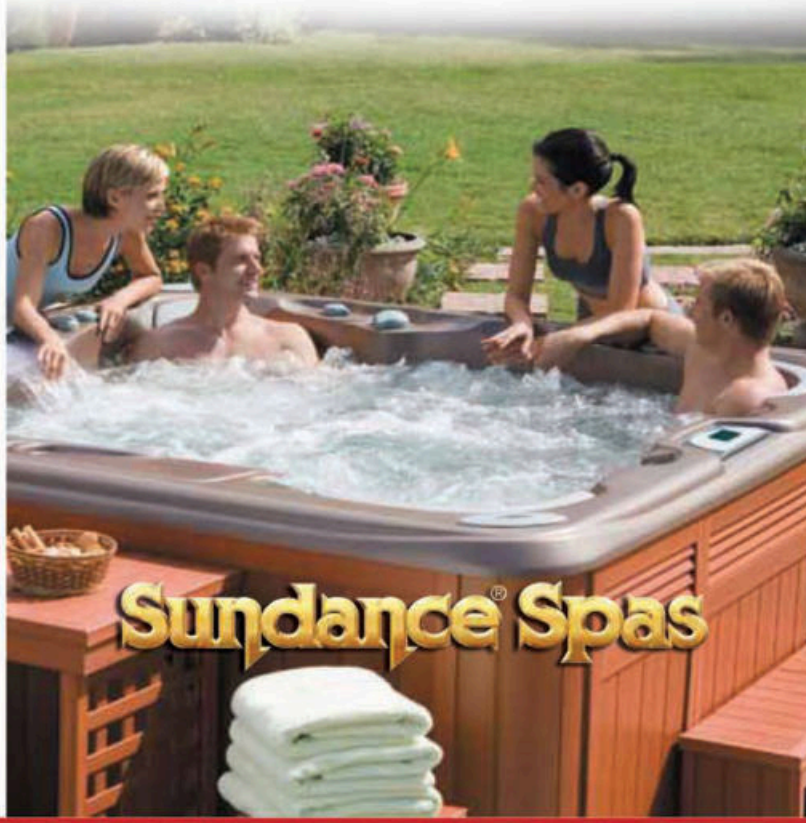

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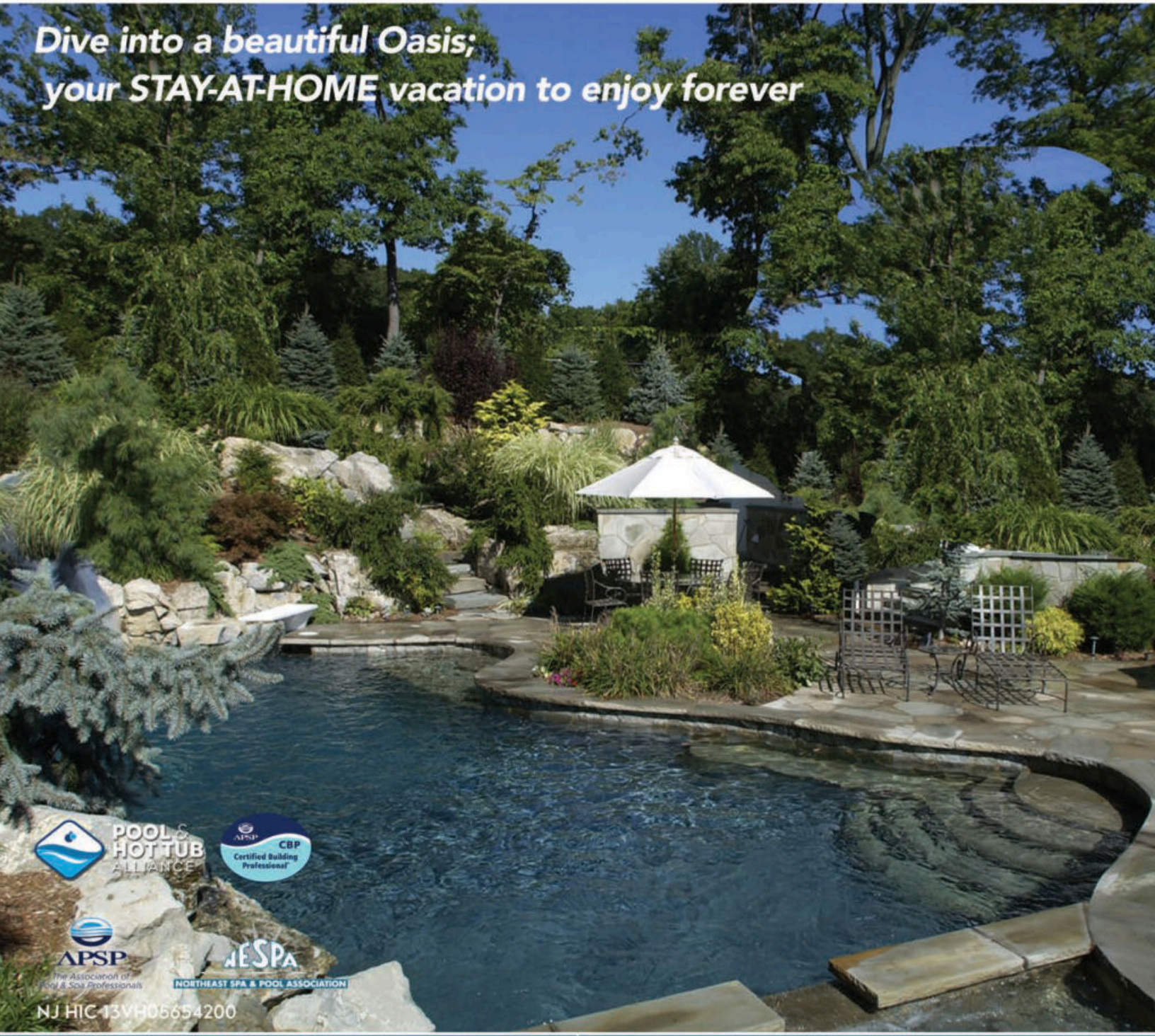

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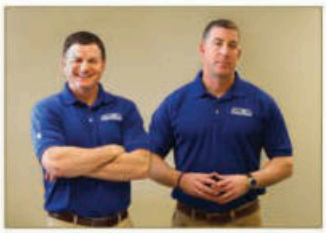

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On the cover:
Colonial Marble & Granite is a full-service supplier of natural stone and quartz materials, offering thousands of slabs, along with professional design and installation services. In response to the pandemic and rising remodeling demands, the company has expanded its technology and safety protocols. To find out more, turn to page 28.
Cover image courtesy of Colonial Marble & Granite

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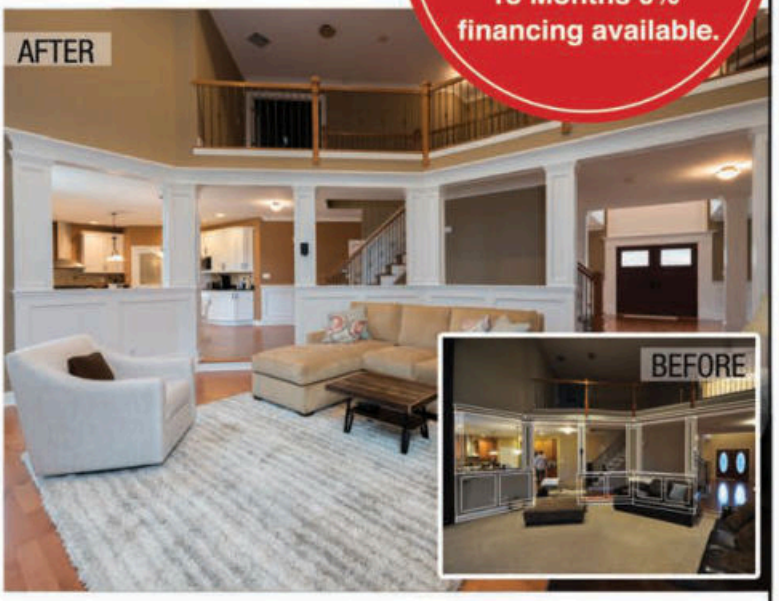

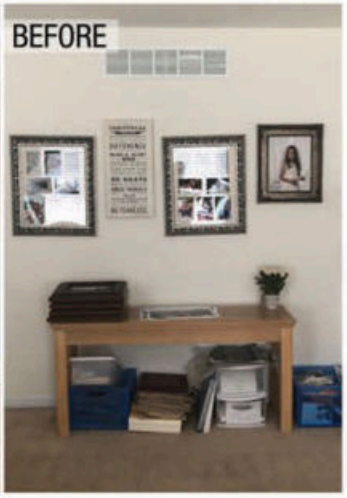

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That Warm & Cozy Feeling

Fireplaces not only keep you and your family warm during the winter months, they've turned into a year-round fixture that becomes the focal point of the home.

With no end in sight for this current pandemic, people are still spending more time at home and will continue to do so now that the colder temperatures are slowly starting to set in. Fireplaces are the ideal fixture to have during the winter months and hold a unique place in the home, and with the holidays around the corner, it's a special time for families to gather around the fireplace and create lasting memories.

Not surprisingly, there is a demand for fireplaces and the experts we spoke to say if you're considering getting one, do not wait any longer.

"If people are thinking about having a fire and creating memories by the fire during the holidays and having that warm and cozy feeling sitting playing games in front of the fire, now is the time," says Jenna Guldin, vice president of sales, Salter's Fireplace Patio and Grill. "Most of the people who wait until October or November to get a fireplace before Christmas or the end of the year, it's going to be too late."

But where to start? There are plenty of options such as wood-burning, direct vent and electric in many different styles. Rettinger Fire-

BY JULIE SHANNON

That Warm & Cozy Feeling

place Systems creates an experience for the customer that is always focused on beginning with the end in mind.

"We always ask questions," says operator Dave Rettinger. "What do you want the fireplace to look like and how do you want it to operate? Do you want something that's going to take the chill out of the air? Do you want something to run for an entire day or do you want something purely [for] ambiance?"

Salter's Fireplace Patio and Grill does the same thing, sitting down with customers and asking about the problem they are trying to solve and their goal.

"What's the feeling they want when they are in front of their fireplace? Do they want heat? Do they host parties? What is the lifestyle of the home? We ask a lot of questions up front and they show us pictures of the home so we can see the wall color, the floor, the design elements to see what colors coordinate, what light is in the room, etc.," Guldin says.

Rettinger says it's easier than ever to get the fireplace that suits your lifestyle thanks to the fireplace industry adapting to people's wants and needs.

"Every person has seen their dream home on Pinterest or Instagram or in a magazine and what the fireplace industry has done is made that dream-level design available at a variety of different price points," he says. "The world is your oyster. You can choose shiplap, marble tile, a TV above the fireplace or maybe something small and compact. There are also options of choosing something ultra-modern or a free-standing fireplace which is more of a piece of artwork. What the industry has done is created accessibility to have a real design focal point feature in your home."

Fireplaces are the ideal fixture to have during the winter months and hold a unique place in the home.

Rettinger says the fireplace industry has evolved to go well beyond a utility aspect.

"They have improved the appearance and aesthetics, as well as the custom nature of finishes. The fireplace has shifted from a strictly utility appliance to more of a designer feature. In a lot of ways it's become like artwork," he says. "More and more people are putting the TV over the fireplace; that has also shifted us to more of the centerpiece of the room, [with] the gathering's focal point being the fire and the TV. For bedroom use or living room use, it's become a very desirable feature that sets the mood. Between the improvements of products and versatility, that's where the industry has shifted. Originally there was resistance to that whereas now fireplace manufacturers have come up with unique ways to have the two work together."

Wood-burning fireplaces are a great option for a young family or those who want to use it as an entertainment or gathering space, as well as for those who are looking to save on energy bills, Rettinger says.

"It's perfect to gather children around the wood-burning fireplace to roast marshmallows and have family time," he says. "On the flip side, you have wood stoves and high-efficiency fireplaces for customers who don't have access to natural gas or who want to reduce dependency on oil. Wood-burning is the best solution for those customers looking to cut down on energy bills and don't mind work associated with owning and operating a wood stove."

Guldin says many customers are coming into Salter's showroom for wood-burning fireplaces and wood stoves because of their versatility.

"You can put gas logs into it for an aesthetic look and it's a huge efficiency gas heater," she says. "You can do a lot with wood fireplaces indoor or outdoor."

Guldin says electric fireplaces are becoming more popular with designers because they can go anywhere you want since no vetting is needed, just electric.

"You can put electric fireplaces in bathrooms, kitchens and living rooms. They look pretty and realistic; some even come with crackling noises," she says. "They come in traditional, linear, all different styles and sizes."

"Electric fireplaces give you the absolute most design liberty because they have no real heat clearances associated with them," Rettinger adds. "You can design an electric fireplace in an enclosure and have a TV above in whatever manner you like."

Both Guldin and Rettinger agree that direct vent fireplaces are the most popular for their convenience and aesthetic appeal.

Image at left courtesy of Rettinger Fireplace Systems. Image above courtesy of Salter's Fireplace Patio and Grill

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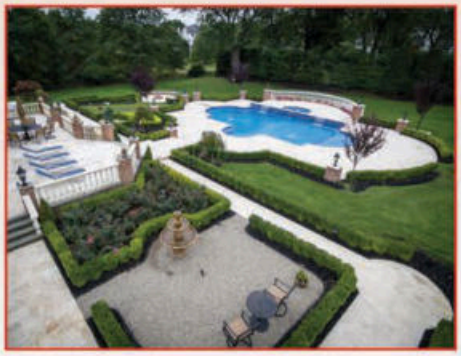

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"People prefer direct vent. It's sealed, you're not getting any byproducts into the room and you're getting the heat and ambiance," Guldin says. "There are many unique features, such as being able to touch the glass. There will be a beautiful flame and you can touch the glass and it's sealed."

"It's great for the busy homeowner, for the entertainer and it's also great for the person who wants to watch football and run the fireplace all day and not have to manage it," Rettinger says. "It comes in many different shapes and sizes. The designer feature gas fireplaces have also improved in terms of flame appearance and aesthetics."

Rettinger says another advantage to gas fireplaces is there is little to no maintenance. "You flip the switch, set it and forget it. There's no real manual work involved with having a gas fireplace," he says. "There's no need to store wood. You're not hauling wood in and out of your house and making a mess."

There are many styles to choose from as well, and Guldin says they can give each customer the desired look they want and suggests they come in with a vision or at least look on Houzz or Pinterest to get some ideas.

"We can make the fireplaces L-shaped, single-sided, a peninsula which is three-sided, anything custom—we can pretty much make anything happen," she says. "Whether it's modern, traditional or rustic, if a customer shows us a picture from Pinterest and says this is what they want, we can make this picture happen for them.

"What's popular with gas fireplaces right now is black glass panels behind the fire. When looking at it, it's reflecting the fire and makes it look much bigger and you don't have to worry about the background clashing with the facade. Also becoming more popular is greige—it's a take on beige and gray mixed together. A standard brick in greige or any grayish color goes with a lot of homes."

Milton Campos of Campos Masonry says natural material, such as brick, withstands heat more than most and it's "always better to build a fireplace with natural material."

Campos and his team also restore fireplaces. "We can make the existing material look like new," he says. "It just needs to be power washed and the mortar joints between the bricks have to be replaced."

Another area where more fireplaces are popping up is in the outdoor space, which extends the living area into the outside and also extends the season. Guldin says Salter's Fireplace has seen a big uptick in outdoor fireplaces and Rettinger says some kind of fire feature is incorporated in many outdoor home renovations.

"You can have it built-in with a TV above your outdoor living room, or outdoor great room as we call it," Rettinger says. "It's also nice to include some sort of electric heater. Having the combination of both a fireplace and outdoor heater extends the usage of an outdoor living space by months." **H&H**

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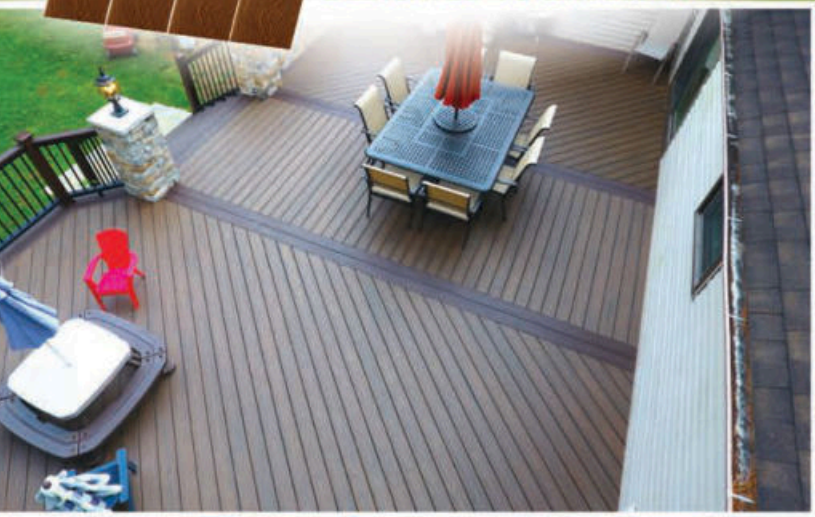

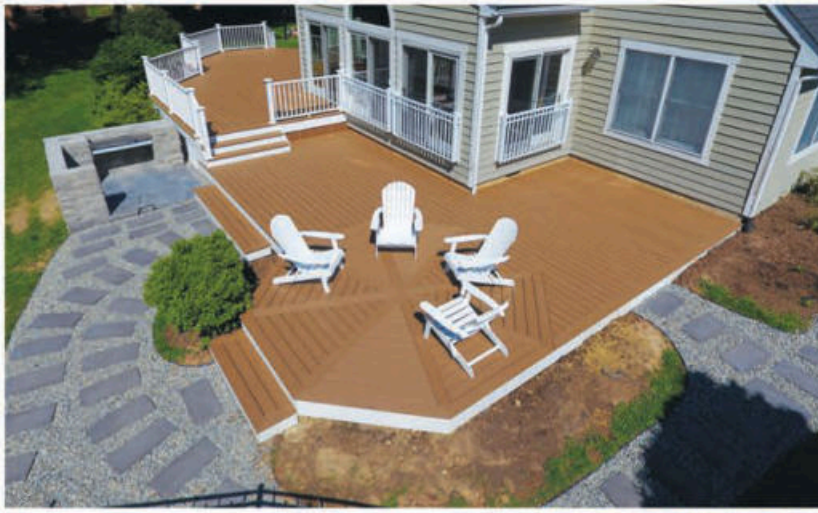

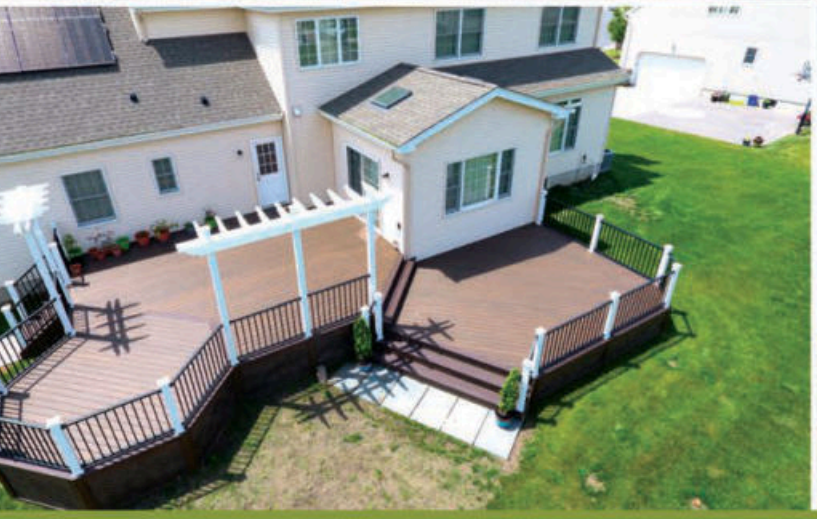

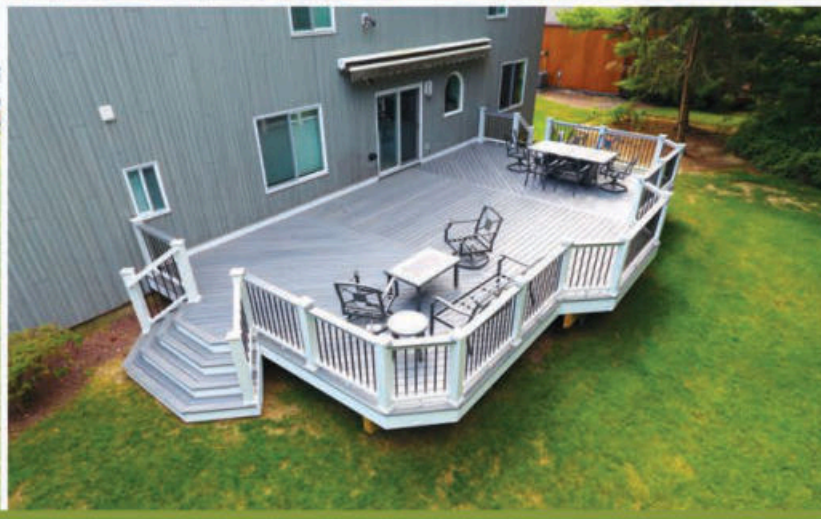

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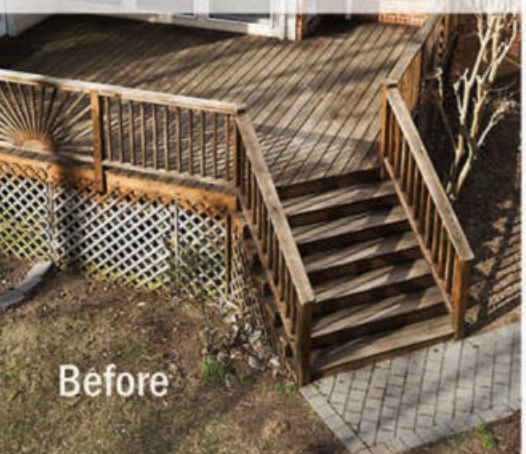

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H&H EXTERIOR

Taking care of essential landscaping tasks this fall puts you ahead of schedule for spring.

LOOKING FORWARD

by **Liz Hunter**

With the hotter temperatures of summer behind us, it's a little more enjoyable to be out in the yard taking stock of what could be improved for next year. Whether it's making your grass greener or installing that patio and fire pit, there are still plenty of days to get it done and come spring, this sweat equity will be worthwhile.

LAWNS AND PLANTS

Summer weather can take a toll on lawns. High temperatures and humidity can dry it out and homeowners' first impulse is to turn on the sprinklers. Soil that never has a chance to dry out can foster fungus, which appears as brown patches, mushrooms and streaks.

"Fall is a great time to address any lawn issues you may have—bare spots, weed infestation—as it is the best time to renovate the lawn because of the cooler weather and the moisture in the morning," says Chris Demato, owner of Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing.

Rich Cording Sr., owner and founder of CLC Landscape Design, says homeowners should tackle regular lawn maintenance now. "Rake up dead grass, thatch and aerate, apply lime and fertilizer and you could even put in a completely new lawn," he says. "It's a great time from now until Nov. 1 to put down seed, or sod up until Thanksgiving."

Michael Pasquarello, degreed landscape architect at Elite Landscaping, agrees. "The fall is probably the most ideal of all seasons to install sod as temperatures are favorable for varieties such as fescue, which is a cool season turf. Just be sure to not install too late into the season as to allow the sod to root in and become established prior to winter. We try not to sod much after Thanksgiving."

Fall is ideal for anything, grass or other plants, getting established. "The soil is perfect for germinating plants. In the fall it will take root and establish before the cold winter comes and it will lay dormant until the spring comes," says Don Panetta, owner of D. Panetta Contracting.

"Cool soil encourages the roots to go deeper, and the sunny days still allow for plenty of photosynthesis," Cording adds. "Plants put in now are going to go dormant in the winter, which means less stress for them. People think May is the best time to plant, but in the past few years as a result of climate change, we get 90-degree days in June before the plants are established, and that stress can be harder for plants than dormancy."

To ensure grass or plant success, don't ignore fallen leaves, says Demato. "During the fall season it is also very important that you clean the leaves off your property at least three to four times. This is a common mistake that homeowners make in waiting until the end of the fall season to clean their leaves. This can be very damaging to your lawn as well as plant material."

Mulch will also help to insulate roots for the winter. "After leaves fall and are raked, mulch should be put down," says Cording. "Once spring comes, that mulch will help hold down weeds. As it breaks down, it becomes an organic topsoil and adds enrichment. Plus, it will look sharp over the winter."

This is also the season when yards display beautiful autumnal colors. "Mums are the typical go-to flower of the fall, however there are many others," Pasquarello says. "Celosia is a

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> **A minor repair, if let go until the spring, can turn into a major problem, particularly around pool areas. ...** If you have a small sunken area near a pool, that can result in ice settling below the surface. As the water builds up in the winter it can create a lot of pressure on pool walls and other structural foundations."
>
> CHRIS DEMATO, OWNER OF ROCK BOTTOM LANDSCAPING & FENCING

great selection as its plumes offer a great texture and colors capture the essence of fall. Ornamental peppers are another great addition for fall color interest. They come in an array of color palettes and most are even edible."

Demato says another great mid-sized shrub to add to the yard would be a burning bush, which turns a brilliant red color throughout the fall season and adds a real pop of brightness to a garden.

AHEAD ON HARDSCAPING

If you have existing hardscaping areas, this is the time to address any repairs. "A minor repair, if let go until the spring, can turn into a major problem, particularly around pool areas," Demato advises. "For example, if you have a small sunken area near a pool, that can result in ice settling below the surface. As the water builds up in the winter it can create a lot of pressure on pool walls and other structural foundations."

As many landscaping businesses

CLC LANDSCAPE DESIGN

have noticed, the interest in outdoor projects has skyrocketed during the pandemic. "With this COVID-19, most people are investing in their backyards. It's your place to bring to life and make your backyard a staycation," says Panetta.

While this is great news to keep these businesses going, it's also harder to get on their schedule. "Typically, this is the time of year when we have some more openings in our schedule, but we're almost all booked up," says Cording.

This makes the sense of urgency all the more important for homeowners to call now. "They can't wait until the spring. Calling now means we can spend the rest of the year planning, designing, getting the permits, etc.," he continues. "Don't dilly-dally." H&H

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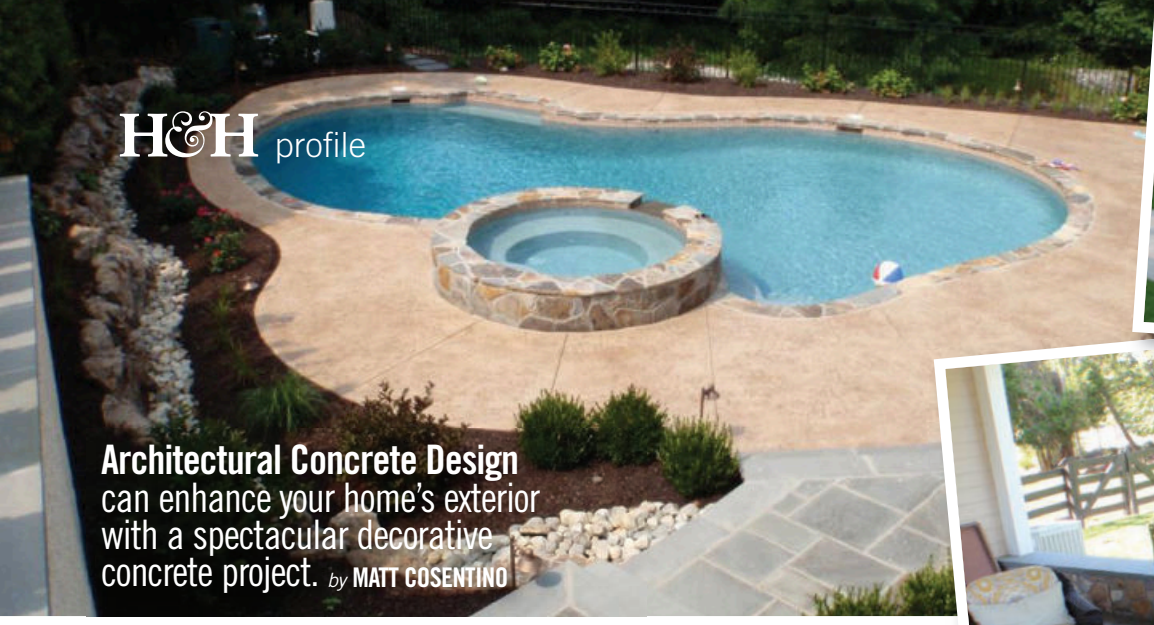

Architectural Concrete Design can enhance your home's exterior with a spectacular decorative concrete project. *by* **MATT COSENTINO**

picture perfect

On the company website for Architectural Concrete Design—one of the East Coast's leaders in decorative stamped concrete for more than 20 years—there is a vast collection of photos from the thousands of residential jobs they have completed.

The portfolio of driveways, walkways, patios and pool decks is stunning to see, until founder and president Chris McMahon makes one very important observation. "Pictures don't do it justice," he says. "It looks even better in person."

McMahon made that discovery himself when he was introduced to stamped concrete while working in high-rise construction in San Francisco in the late 1980s. He immediately fell in love with the possibilities, and made up his mind to return home to the Philadelphia area to start his own company specializing in stamped concrete.

Architectural Concrete Design (ACD) was officially born in 1993 and has since become a staple in the industry.

"We are the go-to company for stamped concrete for all the major architects and big firms in the tri-state area," McMahon says. "We do all the heavy highway projects; in fact, we're working on the Pennsylvania Turnpike right now. We do all the malls, we do high schools and elementary schools and we've worked on every Philadelphia-area casino except one."

But the best part about ACD is that the same passion for the design and construction of those massive projects is applied to private residences in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and northeast Maryland to boost curb appeal or spice up an outdoor living space. "So that experience and that level of expertise that is demanded by those other projects, you get at your home with the same crews," McMahon says.

Most of the crew members, as well as the designers and foremen, have been with ACD for almost two decades. Their craftsmanship and knowledge in the field is something you can't find everywhere.

"Our salespeople are landscape designers, so they'll come out and create the design for you," McMahon says. "They'll look at your home, your patio and your pool and give you ideas. When I do work at my home—and I consider myself a pretty good designer—I still have one of my designers come out just to see what his ideas are."

Stamped concrete is a popular option for homeowners because it can be made to look like a number of materials—including flagstone, brick, tile, slate, fieldstone, cobblestone and granite pavers—at a much better price. ACD offers an almost endless list of styles and colors.

"We can pretty much create any surface," McMahon says. "The product is used in theme parks throughout the world to mimic every material there is.

"It's more affordable [than natural stone], it's more durable and it doesn't chip or settle. Weeds don't grow through it and ants don't live in it like pavers. Natural stone requires a lot of maintenance, but with stamped concrete all you have to do is seal it every two or three years."

Bob Nonemaker is one of the founders of Outerspaces Inc., a company in Glen Mills, Pa., that designs and builds high-end water features. He has used ACD for multiple projects and has always been more than satisfied with the results, including a large pool deck the company recently installed at a retirement community.

"The fact that they can produce thousands of square feet in a day with something that looks really, really good, that's pretty amazing," Nonemaker says. "Most masons are lucky to get down a hundred square feet of material in a day. Everybody is always being pushed in construction to get things done. These guys get it done, and they get it done well."

Of course, with that sterling reputation comes a great demand for ACD's services. That's why McMahon encourages homeowners to start the process now, during the winter, to make sure they can have that dazzling new patio or driveway in time for spring.

They won't be disappointed in the end result, Nonemaker promises.

"Concrete is one of those things where if everything doesn't go right, it can end up really wrong," he says. "But with Chris and his guys, it's like a ballet for them. They know exactly what they're doing and they have tremendous productivity. It's pretty much impossible to find a flaw. They're just really good at what they do." H&H

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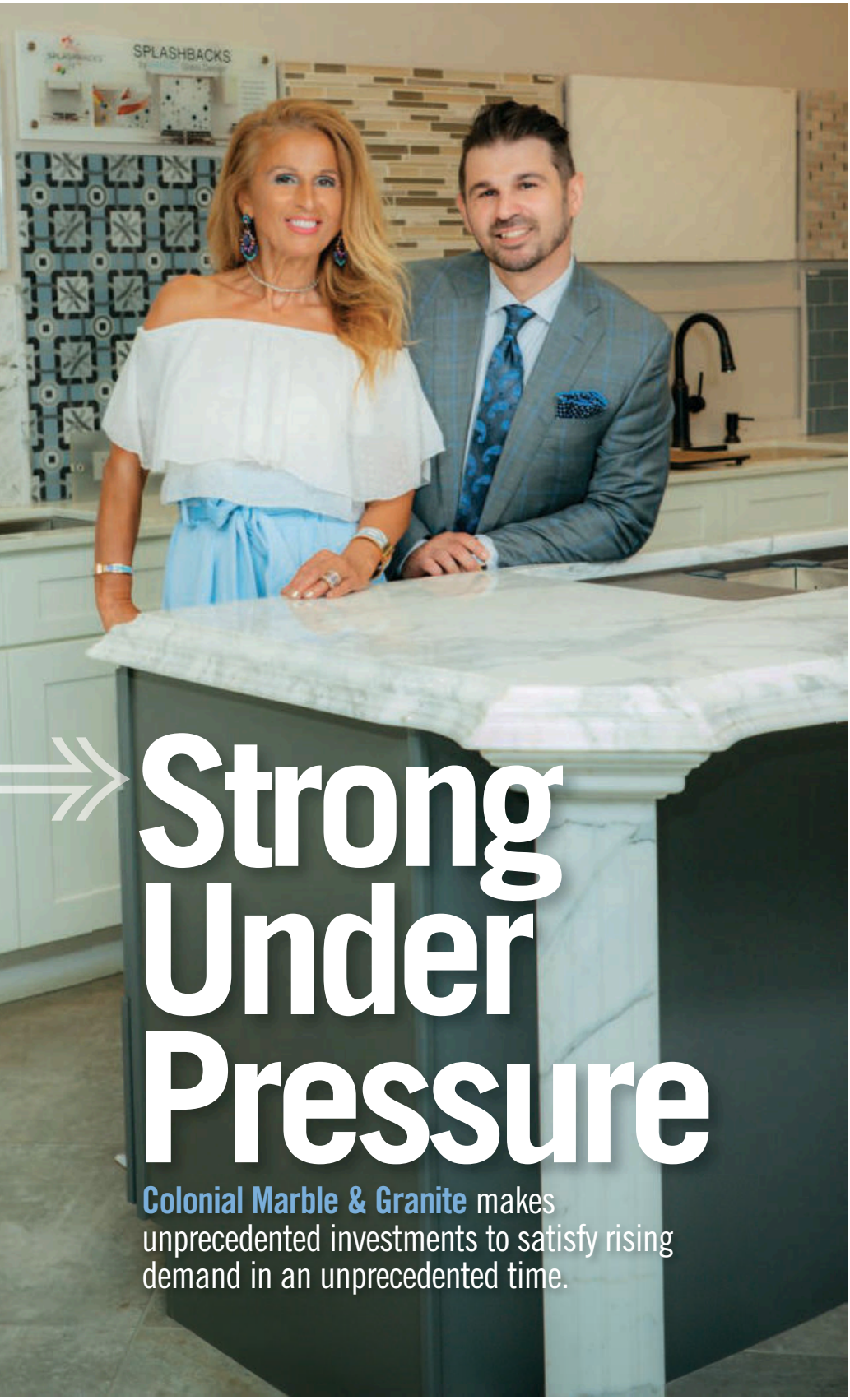
by Lindsey Getz | photography by Jody Robinson



Strong Under Pressure

Colonial Marble & Granite makes unprecedented investments to satisfy rising demand in an unprecedented time.

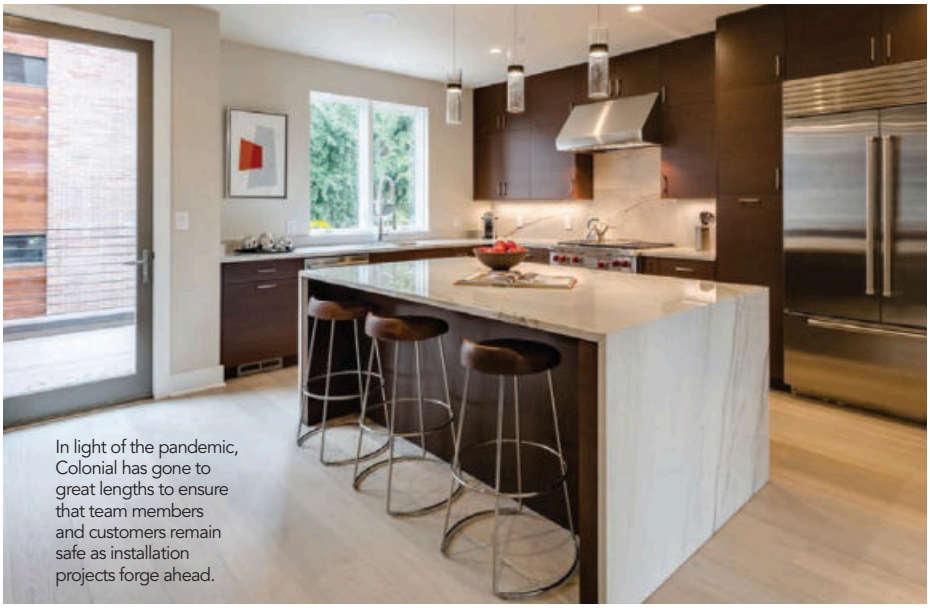
Just as granite and other natural stones have stood the test of time—weathered the storms and remained rock solid for thousands and thousands of years—it seems fitting that the leading provider of stone materials in the tri-state area, Colonial Marble & Granite, is doing just the same during these unprecedented times. The coronavirus pandemic has taken a toll on many businesses and changed life as we know it in many ways. But Colonial is determined to stand strong for its customers—and its people—even in light of these challenges.

Of course, whereas natural stone is known for its durability and unchanging nature, it has been Colonial's ability to swiftly adapt to changes that has helped the company remain steadfast in the face of so much uncertainty. Nikos Papadopoulos, president of Colonial Marble & Granite, says that the pandemic has been eye-opening and sparked changes to the company's culture and safety protocols—some of which will remain in place indefinitely.

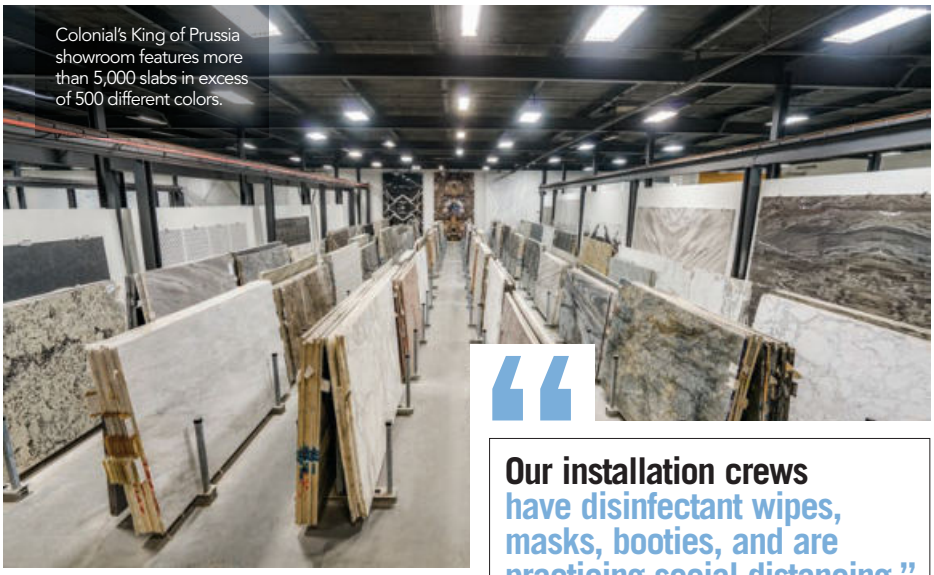
"Our eyes have been opened in terms of ways that we could adapt our cleanliness and our safety so that both our customers and our team members feel safe and comfortable here," Papadopoulos says. "We recognize that visiting the showroom is an important part of the home-renovation experience so we're going above and beyond when it comes to cleaning. That is ultimately for everyone's benefit."

One of the big changes that Colonial has implemented has been to outsource the cleaning to a company that caters specifically to disinfecting. Though such precautions are not required by law, Papadopoulos says the company is taking extra safeguards wherever it can. Plexiglas shields on sales stations have been installed, hand-sanitizing stations have been placed throughout all of the buildings, and there is also an increased level of internal cleaning in addition to the regular disinfecting. Of course, right now, masks are also required when visiting the showroom.

Papadopoulos says the pandemic has also opened the company's eyes to the fact that the virtual experience can initiate and even strongly support the renovation process from home. Fortunately, Colonial had already introduced the Kitchen and/or Bathroom Visualizer tools in which customers can build their new space virtually using a laptop or desktop computer. This tool allows homeowners to see how their space can come together, what materials might work best, and



In light of the pandemic, Colonial has gone to great lengths to ensure that team members and customers remain safe as installation projects forge ahead.



Colonial's King of Prussia showroom features more than 5,000 slabs in excess of 500 different colors.

even receive a price quote. Papadopoulos says that these tools have been invaluable during a brief shutdown caused by the pandemic.

"Renovating is such a visual process and these tools can help a customer to actually put themselves in their new kitchen or their new bath and look at different color tones and variances and start to narrow their choices," Papadopoulos says. "What that meant is that customers were still able to keep moving forward with their projects, even during the shutdown. And when they did come into our showrooms, they had already narrowed their choices. They were less overwhelmed and ultimately had to spend less time in person looking at all the options."

No Slowing Down

With people spending more time in their homes than ever before, the demand for forward movement in home renovations remains strong. Papadopoulos says that Colonial is doing everything it can to ensure that team members and customers remain safe as these projects forge ahead. That has also meant doing everything they can to protect the installation teams.

> **Our installation crews have disinfectant wipes, masks, booties, and are practicing social distancing."**
>
> — **Nikos Papadopoulos,** president of Colonial Marble & Granite

"Our installation crews have disinfectant wipes, masks, booties and are practicing social distancing," Papadopoulos says. "As installers enter our customers' homes, we know that safety protocols are less in our control but we're doing everything in our ability to keep our team as safe in the field as they are here in the office."

And there's no question that the projects are coming in rapidly. As quarantine lingered on, and more folks turned home spaces into work-from-home spaces, many have been inspired to complete upgrades.

In terms of what's trending for those renovation projects, Papadopoulos says that whites and grays remain hot right now. But countertop color choices always come down to a matter of personal preference.

In terms of material, quartz—which Papadopoulos says is nonporous, doesn't need sealing and doesn't stain—is getting a lot of buzz. But given the fact that Colonial has more than 700 natural stone selections to choose from in house with thousands and thousands of slabs (each with its own unique variations), there's certainly something for everyone. This even includes incredibly unique materials such as semiprecious stone countertops made from semiprecious gems like amethyst, rose quartz, mother of pearl and blue agate.

"These are slabs that you can't find anywhere else," Papadopoulos says. "Walking through these selections is like walking through a museum of natural art. This is nature's beauty and when you step inside our showroom, you'll experience slabs you've never experienced before. That makes it very exciting for the customer to have it all under one roof."

Colonial has no intention of slowing down as it works to accommodate increasing demand. It's why the company recently invested millions into the fabrication side of the business. Papadopoulos says it's all in an effort to ensure that the most precise fabrication is producing the finished product customers dream about.

"We're using robotics to ensure we have the best technology available—and that the product we're coming out with is above and beyond what other fabricators are producing," he adds. "We're investing in new technology and adding new machines because we want to keep improving and moving our business into the future. In the end, it comes down to us being the best that we can be for our team and our customers." H&H

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Kitchen photograph courtesy of Colonial Marble & Granite

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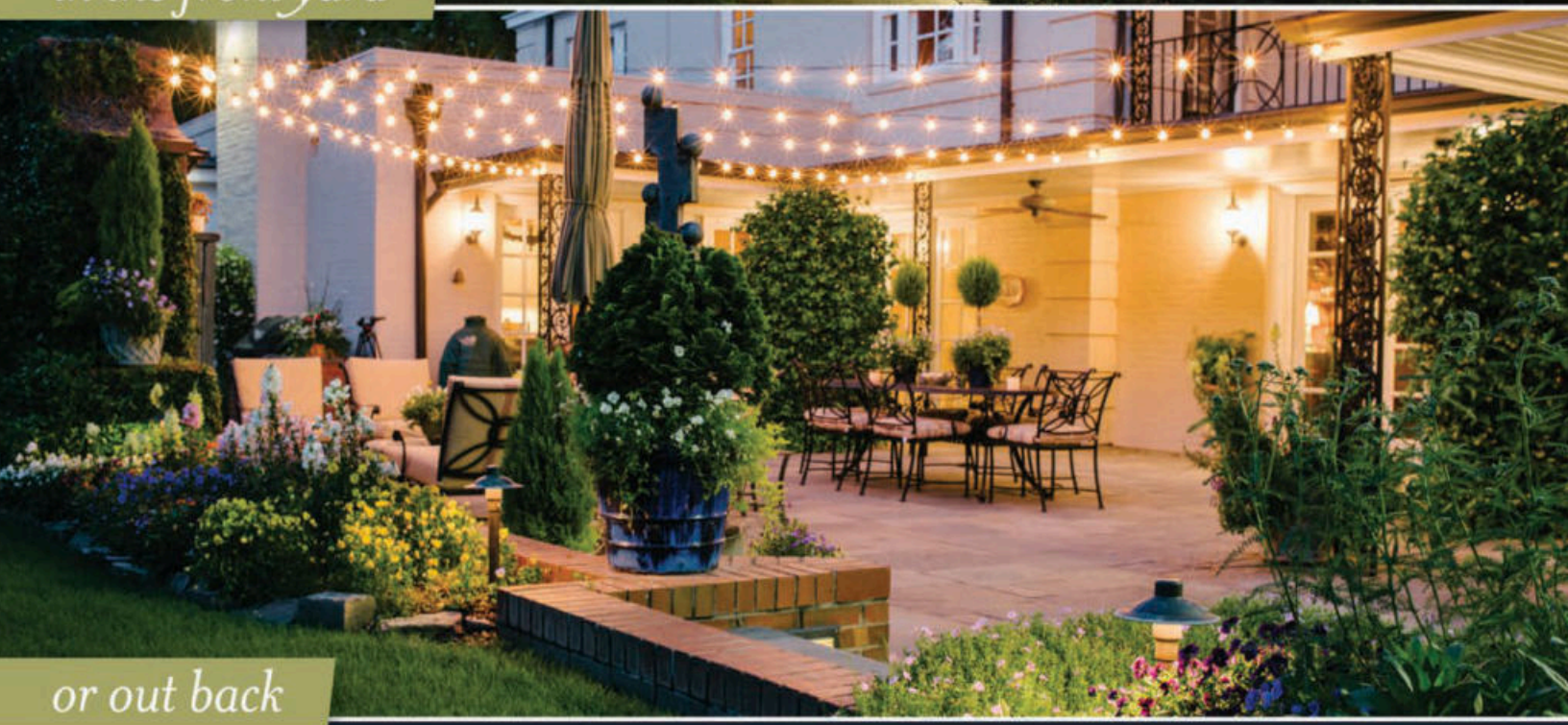

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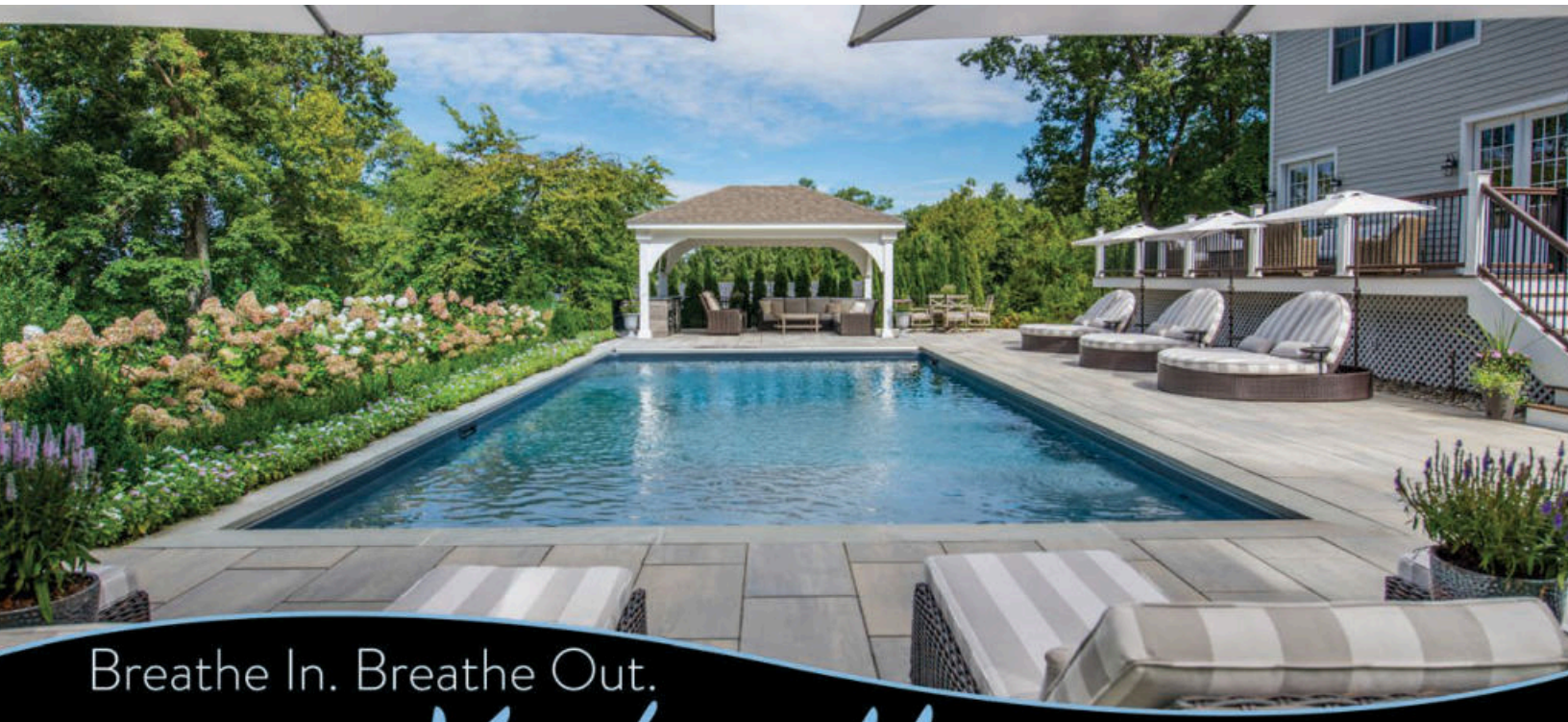

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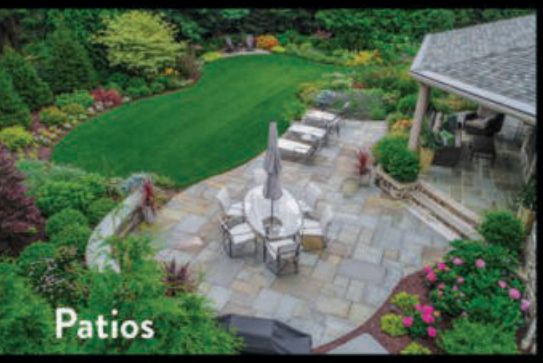

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