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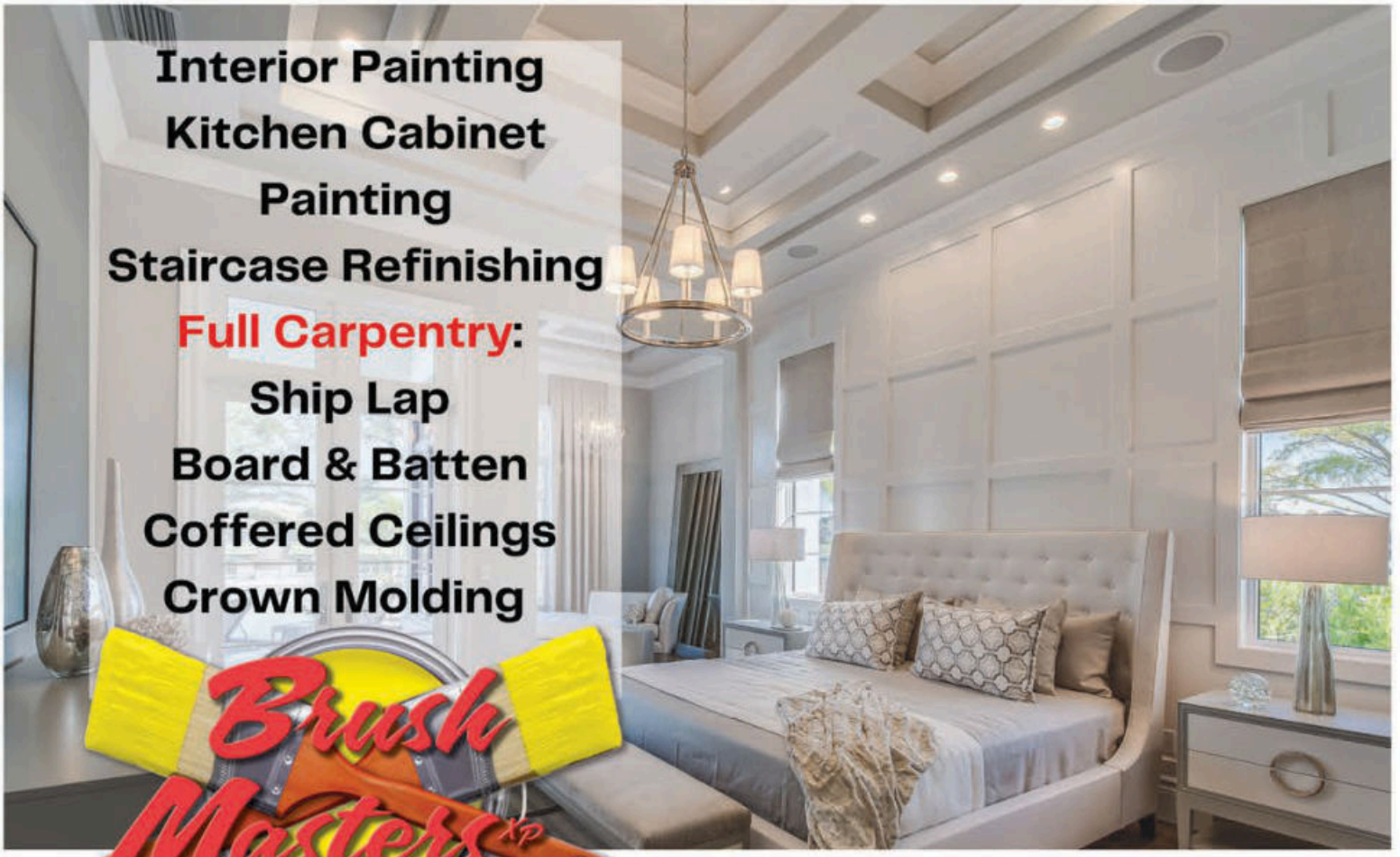
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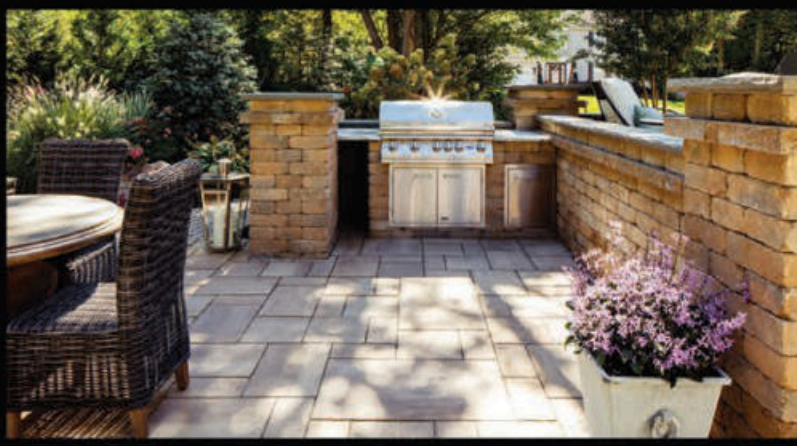
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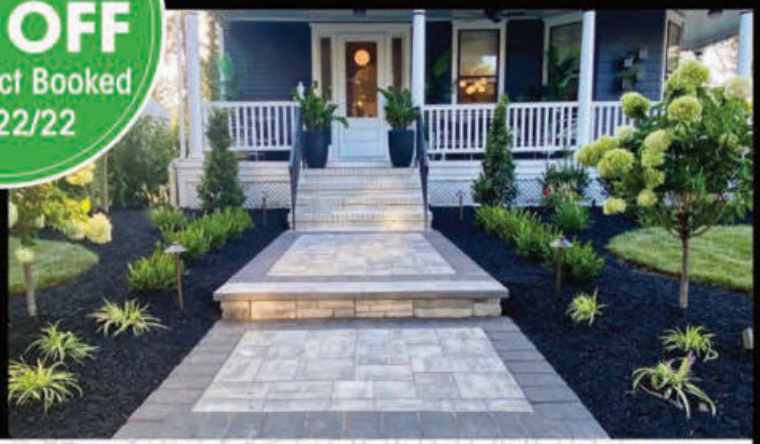
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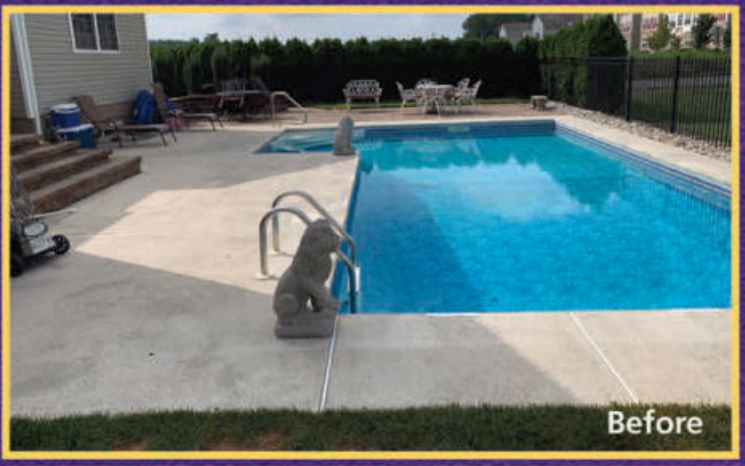
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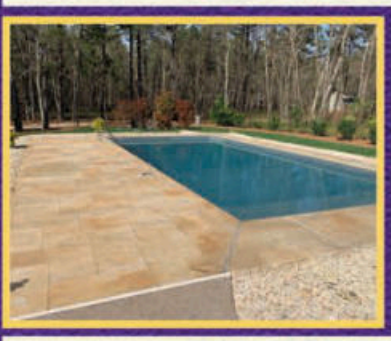


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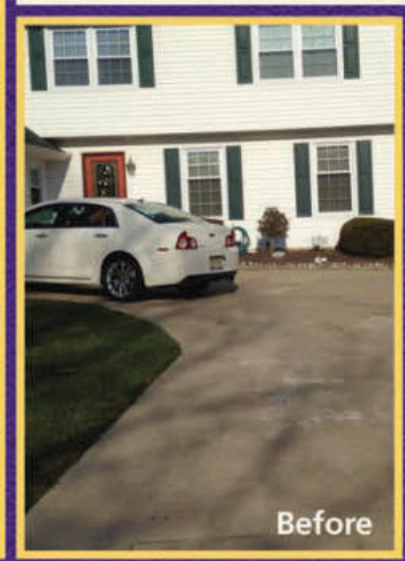
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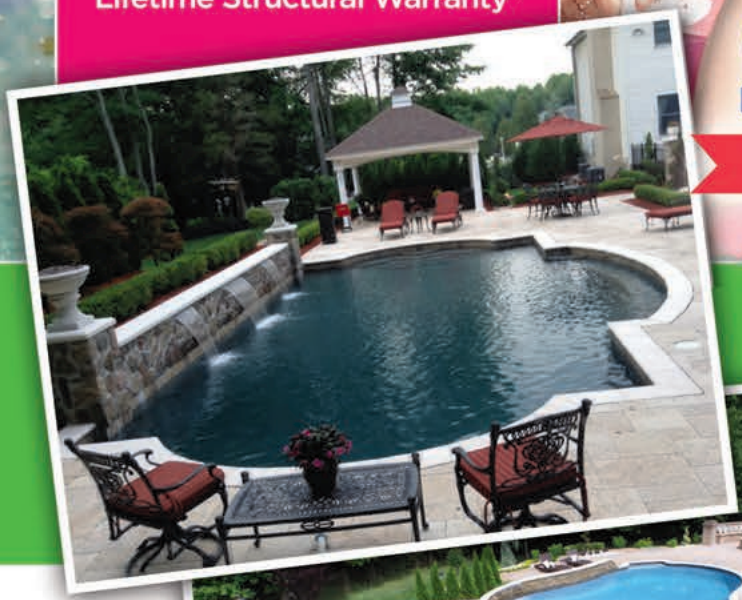
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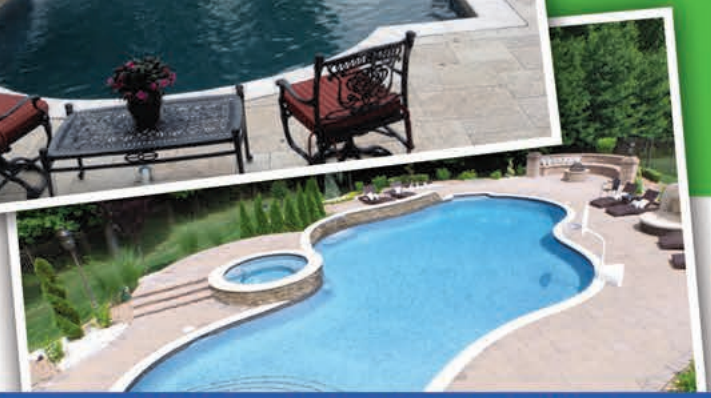
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contents

12 Setting the Tone
The right hardscaping can add new dimensions and appeal to your outdoor living space.

19 Building Relationships
Two South Jersey locations help Amiano & Son bring South Jersey's construction visions to life with a people-first philosophy to doing business.

20 The Big Potential of Small Bathrooms
Experts weigh in on how to maximize space in the home's tinier washrooms.

25 Building a Bright Future
After a record-setting year, Pat McKenna Realtors has even loftier expectations for 2022.

27 They Do It All
Floors Just for You Kitchen & Bath handles every aspect of a renovation project from start to finish, taking the stress out of the experience

29 Circle of Excellence Winners
↔ Realtors

31 Designing a Harmonious Home
The folks at F+S Kitchen and Bath Design Studio are dedicated to making homeowners' visions come to life.

33 Spring Showcase Special Advertising Section

36 Flooring It
From hardwood to luxury vinyl and more, homeowners have plenty of flooring options to fit their needs and budget.



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Setting the TONE

It's easy to see how hardscaping contributes to the overall feel of your outdoor space.

BY LIZ HUNTER

When it's time to add some life to your yard, you may immediately think of blooming flowers and shrubs, but some of the best elements are of the non-living variety: hardscaping. Walkways, patios, retaining walls, fire pits, outdoor kitchens and countless other accents can bring the ideal balance to the landscaping of a home. But choosing the right material requires professional insight.

"Hardscaping is an essential element to the overall look of a property because it can cohesively bring together your home with the outside environment," says Reuben Stoltzfus, owner of EWBN. "Without hardscaping, landscaping falls short because it lacks structure. Flowers, plants and trees can soften hardscaping. Outdoor living is vital to the overall function of your home. A combination of hardscaping and landscaping can most definitely define the vitality of your outdoor living area and the overall look and feel of your property."

TRUST IT TO THE PROS

Although some homeowners may think they can tackle a hardscaping project on their own over the course of a couple of weekends, there are some things only a professional can address.

"With outdoor living projects one of the most important aspects of the overall project is having a proper foundation. Without it you could see water build up, or even your patio becoming uneven over the years," Stoltzfus continues. "Water management often has its own permit aside from other permits required by townships. Of course, each township has specific requirements, but without professional water management it's a big area [of concern] with even getting the project started and then passing final inspection. It is best for the homeowner and the property to go with a professional."

When meeting with potential contractors, Michael Tarleton, owner of TLC Landscaping, says it can be easy to spot the inexperienced. "You'll know if someone knows what they are talking about, whether or not they are well-versed in natural stone walls and different types of materials. It's simple to figure out if they've done it before," he says.

John DiJiosia Jr., owner and president of Plymouth Nursery & Landscape Co., says working with natural stone is a lost art. "It's rare to find people in this business who are skilled in the art of



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Reuben Stoltzfus, EWBN

Setting the TONE

natural stone. Stonemasonry as a trade originated in Italy, which is where my family is from. My father learned it from his father," he says. "They've passed down the art of dressing a stone—shaping it by hand, chiseling it to create the desired shape—and then setting it individually. It's a lot more time-consuming."

NATURAL OR NOT

All materials have their place in outdoor living, and while some are best used in certain projects, it ultimately comes down to client preference and budget.

"I think natural stone can be used in a variety of circumstances, whether the home is 300 years old or new," says DiJiosia. "Aesthetically, some people like a modern look and in some cases, manufactured stones have a modern feel as opposed to old world, natural stone. However, with that said, flagstone can be used successfully in a modern design."

Budget comes into play, he continues. "On average, a project with natural stone will be at least 30% more than using manufactured stone, and that's not because of material costs, it's the time and labor to install it."

In terms of style, Tarleton confirms that trends are leaning modern. "People want a smoother, classic look and are moving away from rustic looks."

And while Tarleton "can make something beautiful with whatever material a client wants, whether it's pavers or bluestone," he does have some advice and preferences of his own to recommend. One being not to use bluestone around a pool. "Bluestone is going to get very hot, so you may not want to be walking on it barefoot in the summer. For that I would recommend pavers or a different natural stone. Pavers do fade over time, but natural stone stays consistent over time," he says.

He recommends natural stone for walkways, and for driveways he likes asphalt. "We can finish off the driveway with a paver border that adds beauty and polishes it off," Tarleton says.

If a homeowner does go with pavers on their project, Stoltzfus says, "There are many different paver design patterns to choose from when it comes to the layout of pavers, like herringbone, running bond, and basketweave. EWBN works with Newline Hardscapes, a division of York Building Products. Anything from Newline has a lifetime warranty, which is another reason we love the line."

DiJiosia says homeowners may also want to consider thermal flagstone. These are cut into uniform thickness and treated with a thermal method that leaves a smooth surface on the stone. It also creates a more uniform color and texture of the stone if the naturally quarried variegation of the stone isn't preferred by the homeowner.

As the popularity of stone sitting walls and fire pits and fireplaces shows no signs of waning, hardscaping companies continue to invest in innovative products to bring these to life.



"People continue to look for ways to create gathering areas in their backyards for entertaining in small groups," Tarleton says. "In the realm of fire pits, outdoor kitchens and fireplaces, we're seeing a lot more things happening."

DiJiosia says EP Henry offers fire pit kits that come in a few standard varieties of round or square, and several colors.

"Retaining walls, patios and fire pits are products we create using Newline Hardscapes," says Stoltzfus. "A popular choice from our customers is a curved sitting wall that borders part of a fire pit and large stepper steps. Both make a statement, but also are a functional part of the overall design."

For sitting walls, DiJiosia says there are a couple of ways they can be constructed. One is building the wall entirely out of stones, or with the use of stone veneer over a cinder block structure.

"The entire interior would be cinder block and then stone veneer would stick onto that to create the look you want. It's not necessarily less expensive to do it that way because the application of stone veneer has more steps, but it can sometimes be easier to work with," he says. "It comes down to the availability of the stone you may want."

UPDATING CONCRETE

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Building Relationships

Two South Jersey locations help **Amiano & Son** bring South Jersey's construction visions to life with a people-first philosophy to doing business.

by **Madeleine Maccar**

Amiano & Son has been serving South Jersey's construction needs since 1968, or for three generations of Amianos. In that time, the company founded on the strength of Louis Amiano Sr.'s masonry has grown with new team members, new technology and even a new location.

But one thing never changed as its services expanded to include home additions, full-home remodels, kitchen and bathroom renovations, and outdoor-living concepts: Relationships come first.



That people-first perspective deepened as the company developed a distinctly family feel. Louis Amiano Jr. assumed his father's president role in 2009, his wife Wendy joined the team to handle marketing and client relations, and their daughter Sophia is bringing her color-certified interior-designer's eye to the company as she attends the University of Wilmington. The Amianos' nephew, Joe Clymer, is also part of the team and has worked his way up to sales manager.

Being family goes beyond blood, though.

"We have a staff where everyone is on the same page because we're so close and connected," Wendy says. "If anything happens to one of our people, they have this whole family who's there for them."

After years of "doing everything in the company," Wendy says her husband eventually wanted to spend less time working in the business as a jack of all trades and more time working on it as an owner. "Lou Jr." has since surrounded himself with people he trusts, with millennials accounting for much of that 19-person team.

"Our staff is very millennial-heavy," Wendy notes. "We have people like Keith Blose, who worked his way up to field manager and still jumps into any role we ask him to. We're at the point where we have longevity with our younger staff. I look at our team and I get excited about the future."

As he planned his transition, Lou Jr. started working with Clymer, who thrived under that guidance. And when Amiano & Son expanded beyond its Southampton office and showroom to a second location at the Shore two years ago, Clymer was the obvious choice to lead it.

"Joe started off in the field right out of high school. When there was a crawl space to go in, we sent Joe," Wendy laughs. "Then he self-trained on interior design, he was doing sales here and there, and he had a real knack with people. Now he's an award-winning salesperson with a strong future."

Treating employees like family and developing their strengths is how Amiano holds onto top talent, like accountant Mary Beth Brodtman, who has been with the company for more than a decade and Wendy swears is so integral that "we all feel it when she's out on vacation." It's also how the company assures its staff is organically invested in the company's future.

"We work hard to retain our younger employees because they're the future of this company," Wendy says. "The benefit to the client is that they're working with a team that's knowledgeable, detail-oriented and proactively trouble-shooting even before the onsite project starts."

What Amiano does is deeply personal work, and the team takes that responsibility seriously. Wendy describes an internal quality-assurance process that engages clients throughout every phase. Pre-construction meetings set expectations; site visits establish familiarity; project managers oversee a project throughout its duration; Blose ensures nothing is left unexamined, right on down to contracts and budgets.

"It took a long time to perfect our process," Wendy admits. "We learned throughout the years that communication with clients is extremely important. We've set up on a cloud-based system so that anyone on a job can take a picture and upload it so the client can see what's going on in their home at all times."

And it's not just about delivering top-notch service. Amiano is discerning in the products it uses, too, interviewing suppliers to ensure everything from the tile and siding it stocks to the tried-and-true brands it builds with to the budget-conscious options it offers all deliver the quality Amiano promises. That's where working with other builders, remodelers and construction-industry peers is especially advantageous.

"You'll always get what you pay for but this industry is constantly changing," Wendy explains. "The Builders League of New Jersey really helps bring everyone together, and Lou's constantly learning something new through NARI (National Association of the Remodeling Industry) and NKBA (National Kitchen & Bath Association)."

That always-evolving education, as well as tapping into its team's range of expertise and soft-skill professionalism, is all part of what makes Amiano & Son special.

"The feedback I get is that everyone loves working here, everyone wants to come into work," Wendy says. "Our clients know that they're working with professionals who really care about the job—which is someone's home—and not just the sale." **H&H**

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The Big Potential
OF SMALL BATHROOMS

by Madeleine Maccar

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

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

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

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

"I don't really consider them any differently because, regardless of the size of the project or the location of the project, the detail and the quality should always be the same," says Anthony DellaPia, president of Floors Just for You. "Whether it is a powder room or a luxurious master bath, we treat them equally."

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

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

their attention on homes' smaller washrooms.

Same Quality, Different Mindset

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

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

"I've seen a lot of projects through the years and, in most cases, when people have hall bathrooms, they're primarily used for children or guests, and there's a big division between a personal bathroom that you use for yourself and your significant other versus one that's used by the kids," agrees David Cerami, owner of HomeTech Renovations. "The mindset is, do you take your kids to a five-star restaurant? Most people are looking to do their hall baths a little more reasonably rather than making the major design statement they would with their master bath."



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

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

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

Making the Most of Small Spaces

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

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





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

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

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

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

For guest bathrooms and powder rooms, those lesser-used spaces present an opportunity to showcase statements pieces that pop but might not be practical for everyday use.

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

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

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



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

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

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





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

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

Trust the Professionals

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

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

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

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

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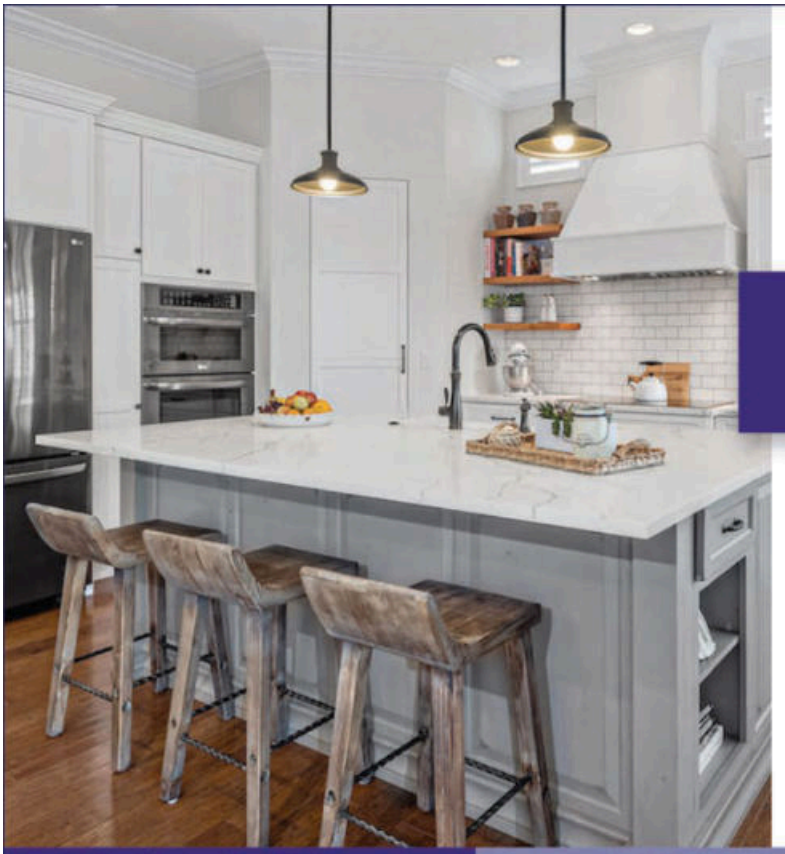
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Building a Bright Future

With a record-setting 2021 that ushered in some welcome, dramatic changes for **Pat McKenna Realtors**, the team looks ahead to the rest of 2022 and beyond.

By **Madeleine Maccar**



A lot has changed in the four decades since Eleanor and the late Pat McKenna founded Pat McKenna Realtors. But one thing that's remained the same is the agency's drive to make sure every client finds their next home as easily and with as much support as possible.

And between those clients' rave reviews and the agency's reputation—like their proven track record as Burlington County's top-producing real estate group for 17 years and running—the results speak for themselves.

But rather than settling into the complacency of a "don't fix what's not broken" mindset, Eleanor and her son Mark are constantly, proactively looking for new ways to be the best.

"Our expectations are a lot higher than most others'," Eleanor confirms. "We eat, sleep and drink real estate—you can drive by at 10-o-clock at night and see our team's still there through the windows."

Lofty expectations certainly nudged the team toward an incredible 2021. They not only saw some record-setting sales numbers—Mark reports that his own team of eight agents did 347 sales amounting to about $126 million in volume, "which was the highest" in Burlington, Camden and Gloucester counties—but also found a new kind of success with last summer's switch to the virtual brokerage firm eXp Realty, and with it, a name change: Pat McKenna Realtors Brokered by eXp Realty.

"It filled a gap in education training for our agents, and brought a lot more technology into our operation," says Mark. "Once we were on this platform with eXp, Zillow then selected us for a flex account, which was a great award for us and increased the amount of leads that come in on a daily basis. It's really streamlined everything in the office."

The virtual brokerage platform fostered an evolution in the realty without sacrificing either its "family-business feeling" or long-cultivated regional recognition.

"Our No. 1 priority was to keep the Pat McKenna Realtors name out there because it's a well-known brand in the South Jersey area and real estate for 44 years," Eleanor explains.

Utilizing eXp has also allowed the team to enjoy some exponential growth internally: After starting last year with 15 licensed real estate agents, the team has skyrocketed to 51 much faster than expected, thanks to a deluge of interest.

"The quality of candidates has increased drastically because a lot of people are getting out of professions that they're tired of, so I see a really, really strong talent pool out there," says Mark. Some of the team's new faces are experienced realtors from other brokerages, as well as a retired police officer, three educators and two former health-care workers. "We have people coming in with good résumés and college degrees who were finance majors and management majors. Their level of professionalism is extremely high."

Anyone who knows what it's like to hand-pick a talented, passionate team knows that there's always the risk of losing those high-performers to greener pastures, and Mark says the move to eXp has been an additional safeguard in retaining the top talent, especially as the realty promotes its agents' individual name-recognition brands.

"When they get really good, they leave," he says. "With this, they won't want to go anywhere else because they have everything at their fingertips and three different revenue streams: It's an agent-driven model where our agents get health benefits through the company, they have stock options, there's different things like 'revenue share,' which is like a pension. So this is a really great model that fills that void."

Befitting an expanding team and these ever-changing times, Eleanor has undertaken a different kind of building with the brand-new Lenore Manor, a three-story, mixed-use residential/commercial structure taking shape on the agency's redeveloped former site.

"We knocked down our old facility and are just about to move into Eleanor's new building that she built," Mark says. "It has 23 apartments we'll be leasing and 4,600 square feet for our office. The apartments will start to be occupied the first week of May and we should be moving into our new space by the first week of July."

With a "whirlwind of good things" going on, the McKennas are thrilled to have a growing team that not only are they proud to meet the future with but also will help continue their mission of giving back to the community.

"It's really exciting," he says. "This town has always supported us and so has our client base, so we try and go above and beyond to be a part of the community, whether it's fundraisers, or donating to the local baseball and basketball teams, the PTAs, the police, the church, we support Operation Yellow Ribbon every year—over the years, it's been literally hundreds of thousands of dollars that we've donated to people in Evesham Township, and we've been able to do that because of the support we receive from them." H&H

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They Do It All

Floors Just For You Kitchen & Bath handles every aspect of a renovation project from start to finish, taking the stress out of the experience. *by* **Matt Cosentino**

In the home improvement industry, the reliable and trustworthy companies have an uphill battle to prove their reputation. Homeowners are justified in their skepticism when so many have been burned in the past, but this motivates people like Damien Massa and Anthony DellaPia to work even harder.

When Massa and DellaPia were introduced by mutual friends more than a decade ago, they immediately hit it off as they discovered each other's background in construction and their shared desire to improve the home renovation experience for clients. Now, as partners in the complementary companies Floors Just For You and Built Just For You Construction, they are committed to providing a wide range of services in a stress-free manner.

"We started out as a small general contracting firm but we decided to branch out, open up a showroom and make the vision we had even bigger," Massa says. "We have evolved into a full-service interior solutions company that can handle every aspect of your job from start to finish."



Floors Just For You and Built Just For You Construction specialize in kitchen and bathroom remodels, finished basements, additions, outdoor decking and even new home construction. No matter what they are hired to do, they aim to make the process as streamlined and straightforward as possible for the homeowner. That means each client is paired with one point of contact who will act as a guide for the duration of the relationship.

"From the very first hello to your signing to your final cleanup, that person will be with you every step of the way," Massa says. "We do not push customers off after they sign to a warranty department or a service department or a construction department. Everything is custom tailored and it's a personal approach with your design executive." Material selection is all done in the showroom, which has everything from cabinetry, flooring and countertops to shower doors, tile and plumbing under one roof.

"It makes it very easy for the customer. There's never any questions about who they need to communicate with. If for some reason something goes wrong, they know exactly who to call and they can have confidence that they're going to resolve anything that needs to be resolved," Massa says.

Keeping everything in-house is a huge benefit for homeowners. "I think everyone has had some sort of bad experience with contractors, whether it was paying them and not getting the work completed or not getting the desired quality," DellaPia says. "We're aware of their concerns, so we try to ease them into the process from the beginning and help them feel secure that we're not like those other companies."

By not relying on outside subcontractors, Massa and DellaPia have control of the quality, productivity and schedule. "When a company relies on outside people, they are at their mercy. If they don't show or are late, the project takes longer and we don't have control over what they do or how they do it," DellaPia says. "Since we're in control, we keep the project on track with no down days, meaning homeowners aren't inconvenienced any longer than they need to be."

That control also provides peace of mind for homeowners who don't need to worry about who is in their home.

When all is said and done, being able to deliver those dream spaces—and going above and beyond the homeowner's expectations—is a rewarding feeling.

"For me, one of the best compliments from a customer is when they say they feel like they are in a vacation home," says DellaPia. "To know that the transformation was so dramatic for them and beyond what they expected, is great to hear."

Massa agrees. "When the customer sees the finished project and sees the idea they had in their head come to fruition, it's the best part of our job." **H&H**





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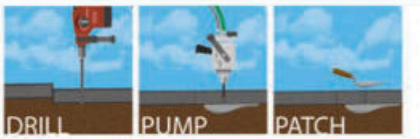
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Designing a Harmonious Home



AT THE FAMILY-OWNED F+S KITCHEN AND BATH DESIGN STUDIO, LISTENING TO AND EDUCATING CLIENTS ARE KEY IN ENSURING THAT EVERY JOB IS A CHANCE TO BUILD EVEN STRONGER CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS. *by* Madeleine Maccar

Helping people renovate and remodel their homes isn't a science: It's an art, and one that requires an experienced, expert eye and a dedicated team to nurture an intangible vision into a fully realized dream come true.

It's also a gift to share with others.

"I'm able to detect what a customer likes from the moment I walk into their home, especially if they have lived there for a little while," says Guy Ndandji, owner of F+S Kitchen and Bath Design in Voorhees. "By the end of the conversation, I know what to pull from our showroom for you and 95% of the time, you will like it."

The team effort it takes to deliver breathtaking renovations isn't just about bringing together talented designers and contractors, though. Homeowners themselves play a critical role in turning the creation process into a successfully completed project, as their lifestyle and tastes erring toward historic, contemporary, classic or modern decorating are what guide Ndandji's expert recommendations.

"It's about really understanding the client, listening to them and letting them express themselves," he says. "The first piece is the first free estimate, our first conversation, and that can take one to two hours, sometimes three hours if the kitchen is big and complicated."

For Ndandji, it's of the utmost importance to start by facilitating a "space of confidence" that encourages clients to trust his expertise—and also allows him to speak frankly about the ways individual tastes, current trends, functionality, spatial limitations and the overall harmony of home design might be at odds with what an optimally completed project looks like.

After all, he wants F+S's clients, as well as the future occupants of the home, to be happy looking at the final result every day. That's all hinged upon maintaining the harmony of the home, inside and out, even if he has to steer clients away from popular trends they'll regret spending money on once they see how it was a better idea than a reality they have to live with.

"Clients are paying me to help them, not to agree with them," Ndandji points out. "If you're spending money, you should let me, as a professional, help you out, to bring something that will pair well with your style, and your living style. I'm here to help them, and I can help them because I have the talent for it."

He continues: "If you attach yourself to a trend just because you've seen your friends' new kitchen, it may not pair with your style. The trends come and go, but your taste doesn't."

To that end, Ndandji believes in educating clients about why certain materials, colors and fixtures might create a clashing décor. And that's where F+S's 1,500-square-foot showroom is an invaluable bonus, providing customers with a streamlined, thoughtfully organized array of options showcasing the domestic and imported kitchen, bathroom and other interior appointments available to customers.

"From the outside it looks like a little box but, because of my design experience and how we were forced to think about the ways we should set things up since we didn't have a bigger space, when you walk in, it feels like a mall because everything is synchronized to perfection," he says. "People are very impressed by the setup, the cleanness and the way everything is arranged. We didn't want anyone to be disoriented by their options."

A true full-service, one-stop shop, F+S stays with clients once they've selected the colors, materials and items to refresh their homes' designs, with its in-house construction team of licensed contractors guiding the project from demolition to site cleanup, whether they're fully responsible for the entire project or assisting a particularly handy DIYer.

"We plan with the customer, we design for the customer, we budget with the customer and we build for them," says Ndandji.

Ndandji doesn't just educate his clients: He stays on top of industry trends, reading and learning about the developments and advancements he and the F+S team can utilize to customers' benefits.



But nothing beats that old-fashioned human touch of attentive customer service and diligent, genuine relationship-building that extends the company's family-owned feeling to each and every client.

"Our clients become family," Ndandji says. "We're a small family business, and we believe in working for the clients, and especially creating a strong relationship. … We believe that in doing so, it will open up the way for a future to work together again. If you want to grow, you have to believe that everything's possible to satisfy the needs of your clientele." H&H

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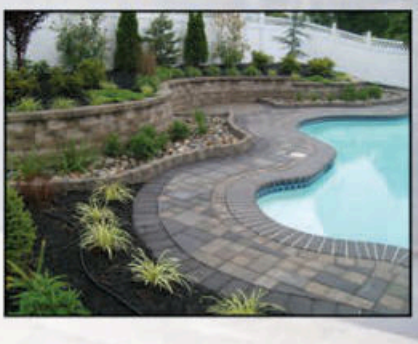


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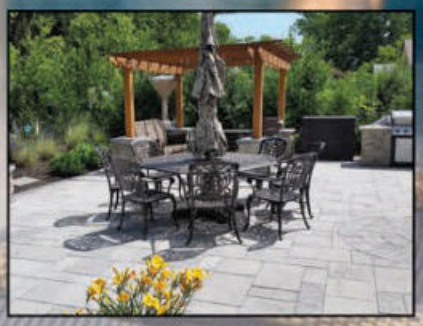
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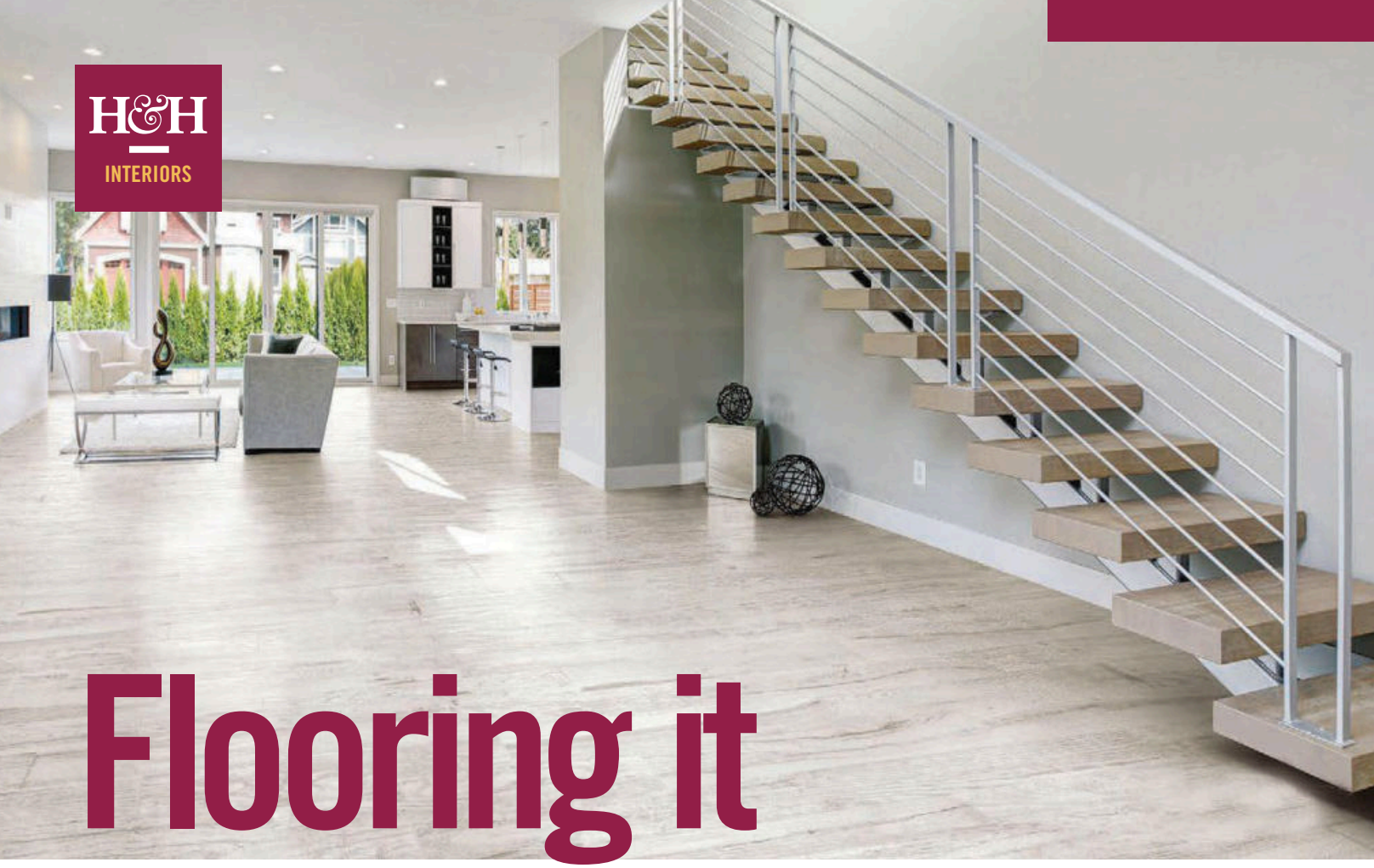
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Flooring it

From hardwood to luxury vinyl and more, homeowners have plenty of flooring options to fit their needs and budget.

by **Matt Cosentino**



When most people dream about renovating their homes, their minds automatically drift to the exciting aspects of the project, whether it's the cabinetry and countertops in a kitchen, the vanity and enlarged shower in a master bathroom or the bold new paint colors in a living room. One piece of the remodel that might get overlooked at first—but is of critical importance, no matter what the space—is the type of flooring to choose.

Flooring options have advanced dramatically over the years, and a wide variety of selections are now available to fit varying budgets and lifestyles. An update to one room or an entire level of a home can make a world of difference, even on its own without an accompanying renovation.

"People are definitely home more [since the pandemic started in 2020] and it's been very busy with projects," says Julie Ward, showroom manager and design consultant at Renaissance Ceramic Tile & Floor. "Updating the flooring, whether it's the whole floor or just a bathroom floor, brings your house back to life. With many different flooring options and colors it has a big impact."

House & Home spoke to local experts to learn more about the different options and the pros and cons to each.

Finding the best fit

To help customers determine the type of flooring that will best suit their needs, industry professionals first try to find out as much about their lifestyle as possible.

"The first question we ask is how active is their household? Do they have children or pets? Do they entertain a lot?" says John Schwendiman, flooring general manager at Bucks County Wholesale. "Once we get those answers, then we can steer them in the right direction."

Yasu Yamauchi, owner of Yasu Floors LLC, offers several different types of flooring and will make recommendations based on his experience.

"It depends on the situation in the house," he says. "Last week we did a house where I proposed vinyl because the [homeowner] had a pool and he comes into the house wet. When water comes into play, hardwood is not a good option. It all depends on the client. I try to see what the client likes and sell them whatever they want."

Dennis Gehman, president of Gehman Design Remodeling, first asks if the flooring is for one particular space or multiple rooms. Before making his suggestions, he also needs to understand the budget the homeowner is working with.

"Most people would love to do real hardwood everywhere and/or real tile," he says, "but that can be crazy expensive."

Options upon options

As Gehman notes, hardwood is still a popular choice for those who can afford it. Yamauchi is often tasked with reviving hardwood floors, perhaps if a customer has purchased an older home where the original flooring had faded.

"A lot of people are looking for sanding and refinishing their floors," he says. "This week I already did a 60-year-old hardwood that was under carpet and we brought it back to life. But sometimes it can just be two or three years old and the client doesn't like the color anymore and wants to change it."

In homes where young children and pets are present, however, hardwood might not be the best selection, regardless of price. Those clients need something that is easier to clean and maintain.

"A strong material these days is luxury vinyl, whether that's luxury vinyl plank, which looks like a wood board, or luxury vinyl tile, which obviously looks like tile," Gehman says. "That will be a fraction of the cost of real hardwood or real tile and the durability is definitely there for general wear and tear as well as with animals."

"A lot of people now are going with the luxury vinyl products just because they're cleanable, water-resistant and scratch-resistant," Schwendiman agrees. "For families with pets and kids and active lives, it holds up a lot better than the hardwood. With hardwood, you get a better return on your investment than vinyl, but it's not as durable as the vinyl."

Manufacturers continue to take the luxury vinyl planks to a new level, mimicking the look of wood without the hassles. Even the pros sometimes have a hard time noting the difference between vinyl and real hardwood.

"The image that they're printing on these tiles is incredible," Ward says. "Every time something new comes in, it almost feels like wood grain or like you could get a splinter from it even. It's hard to tell what's real and what's fake anymore."

Yamauchi opines that laminate flooring resembles real hardwood even more than vinyl, although there are drawbacks.

"The vinyl is waterproof on top, waterproof at the bottom, it is slip-proof and it doesn't scratch," he says. "If you drop water on top, it just stays there and doesn't go under, so you can just wipe it off. Laminate consists of recyclable wood pretty much, so it absorbs water. Water goes in and the laminate expands. I

Photographs courtesy of Renaissance Ceramic Tile & Floor





don't do a lot of laminate, unless the client is going to take care of it and really likes the way it looks. It looks way more like wood than vinyl, but when it comes to water it's not good."

Schwendiman believes that laminate manufacturers are addressing the water issues recently, and it does have the advantage of being much more affordable than vinyl.

Ward's company sells a lot of porcelain tile as well, which is also a strong option for cleaning purposes. Natural stone requires more maintenance but is popular for kitchens or master baths.

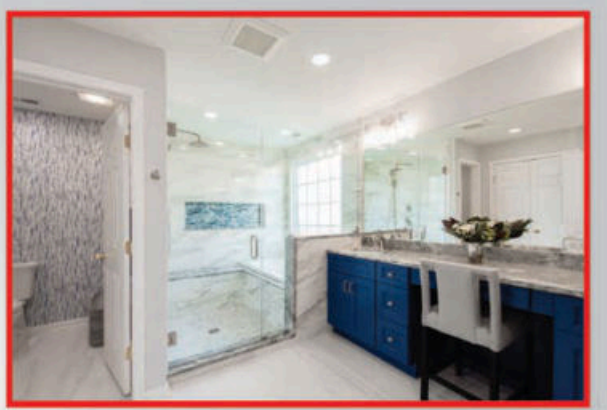
Carpet is still used, mainly in bedrooms, offices or a finished basement, but Schwendiman says homeowners with allergies are getting away from it since it traps dust and hard surfaces are easier to clean. Gehman also points out that carpet can be a tripping hazard for seniors.

"For aging in place or ADA compliance,



> "For aging in place or ADA compliance, smooth, hard flooring is the best."
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smooth, hard flooring is the best," he says. "People talk about slipperiness and that's a consideration, but by code and actually by law, flooring materials need to meet a certain slip resistance qualification before they can go out to market. The most common [falls] are in a bathroom where it's a little wet or just inside a door where you're coming in from outside. There are some that are better than others but all must meet a minimum qualification."

Trends and popular colors

One major theme in recent years is to keep the same flooring throughout an entire level of the home, rather than, for example, using carpet in the living room, hardwood in the kitchen and tile in the bathroom.

"People don't want to break up the rooms, they want that open feel," Schwendiman says. "So they'll continue the flooring throughout the whole first floor or second floor instead of breaking it up. Some people still opt to put ceramic in the wet areas like kitchens, bathrooms and laundry rooms in case there is a leak. But the luxury vinyl can withstand all of that wetness."

"Consistency is a big thing with a house," Ward adds. "If you can run your floors all the same, it's going to make it feel bigger and more consistent versus having all these different floors throughout the home."

As for color, Ward says neutrals are always a big request, such as whites, grays and taupe. Gehman sees the wood tones coming on strong, but the trends always seem to change quickly.

"Gray is still in high demand with beige coming in second," Schwendiman says. "In the hardwood arena, it's the white oak natural or real light colors and wide planks. Next year it will probably be dark again. Very few manufacturers have actual colors like blue or red or green, they're all one form or another of gray or beige."

No matter what colors or styles customers think they want, Schwendiman advises them to visit a showroom and get a feel for the options in person as opposed to on a website. He has been in the business for 30 years now and even he is constantly amazed at what is out there.

"It was all carpet and hardwood when I started," he says. "Sheet vinyl was on its way out when I started, then laminate came into play, and now luxury vinyl has taken over a big chunk of the market share. But laminate and carpet are making their way back. You have to keep the ratio of what people want in the store. People don't use sheet vinyl anymore, so we only have one display of that compared to 15 or 20 displays of luxury vinyl. People should definitely come in and see the samples."H&H

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