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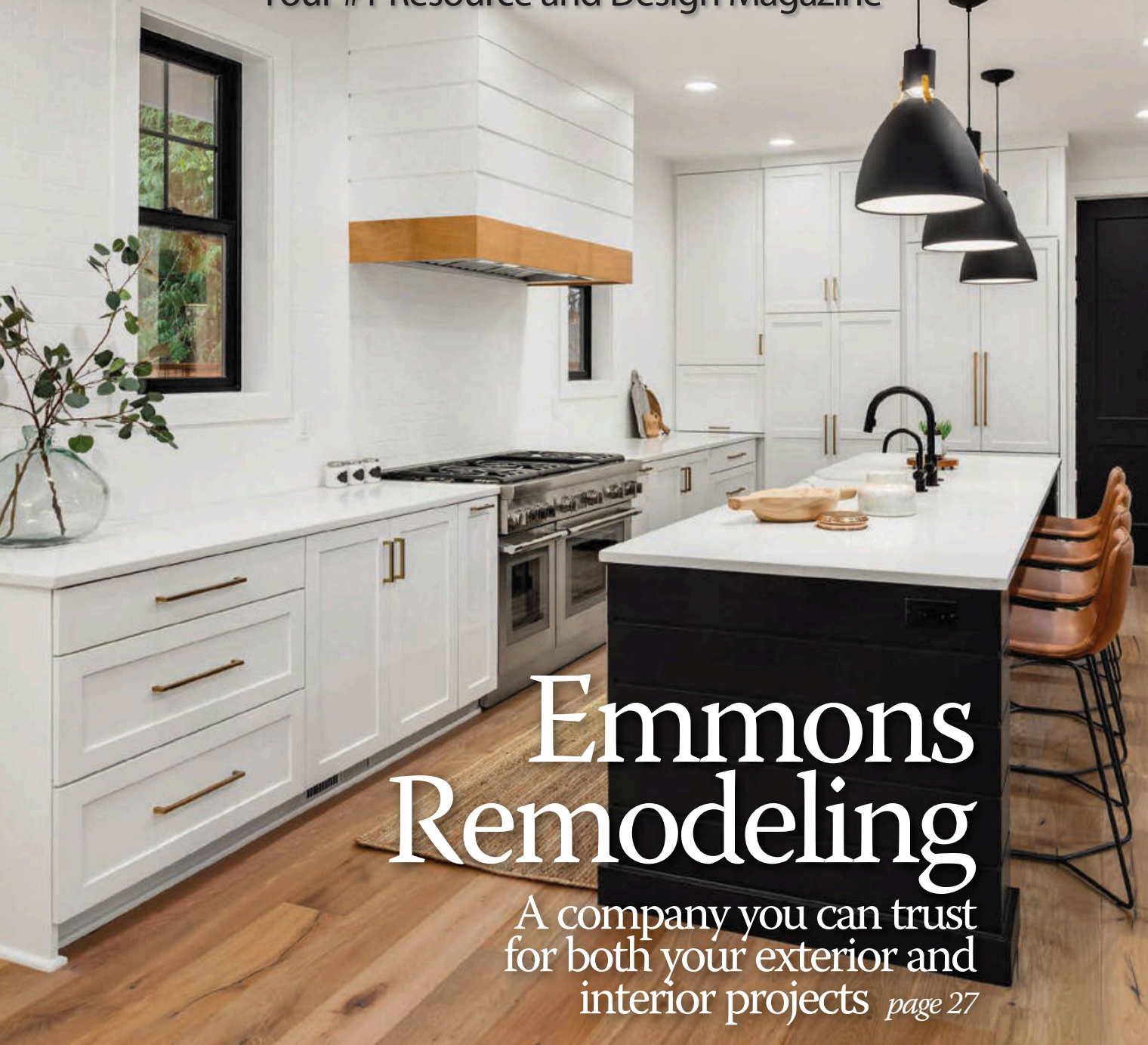
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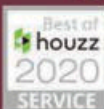
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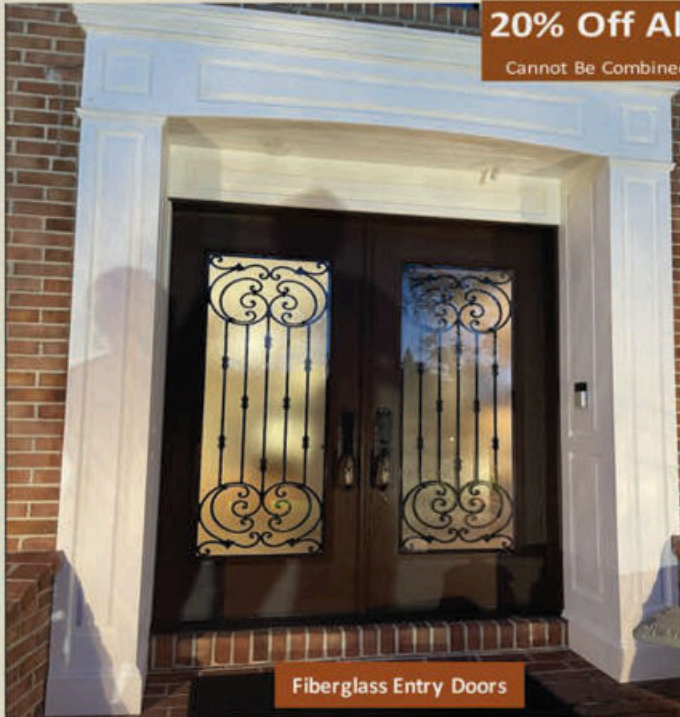


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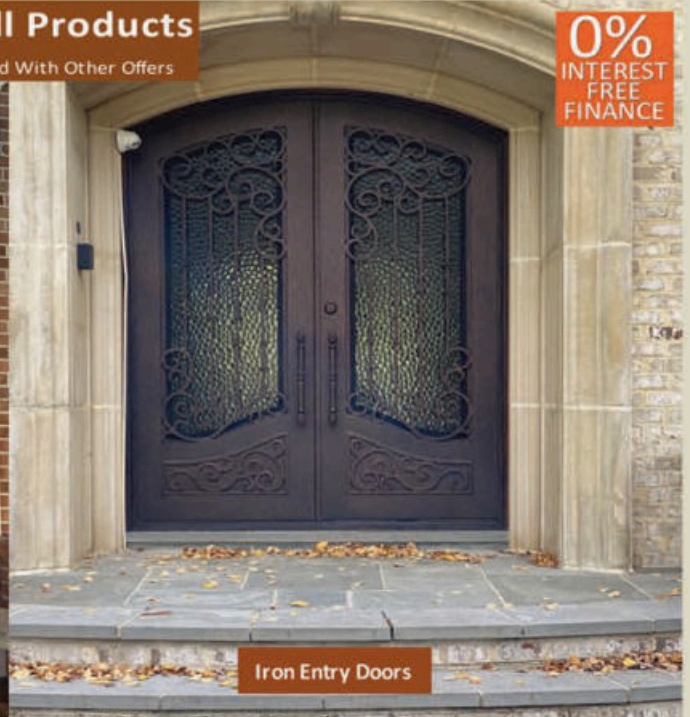
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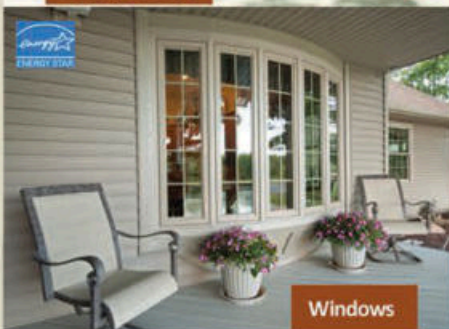
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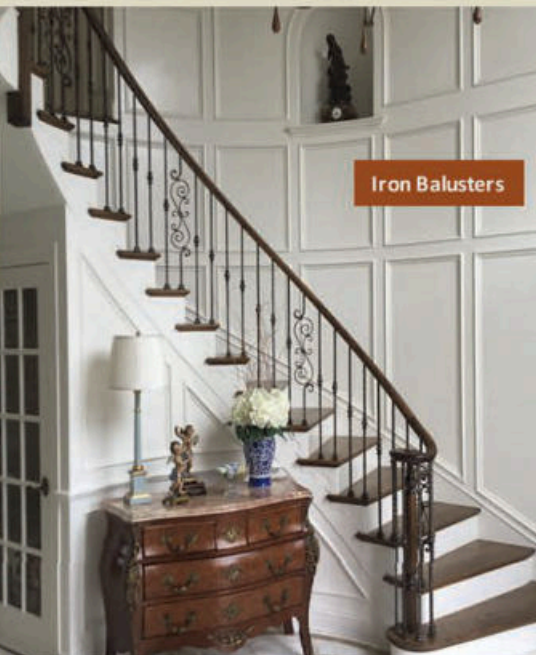
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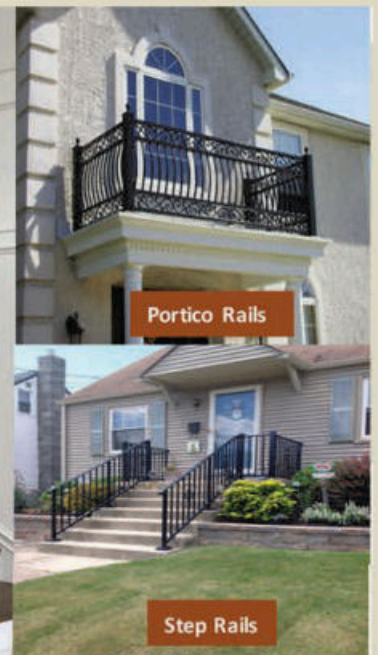
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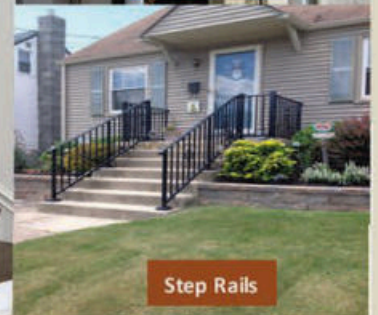
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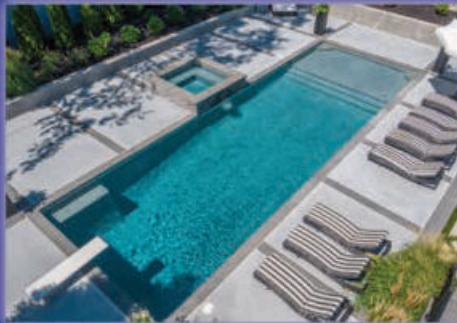
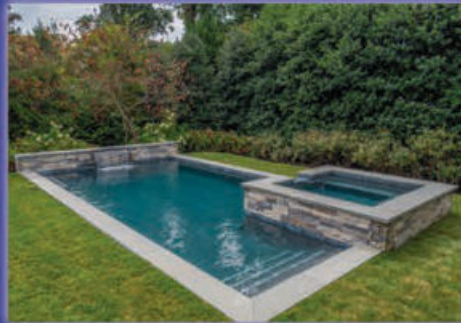
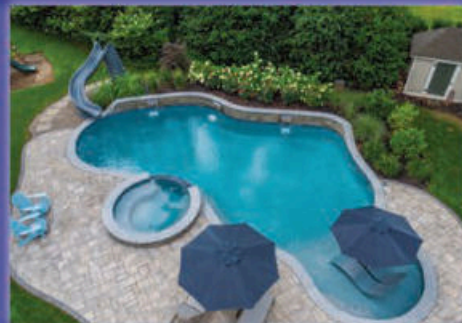
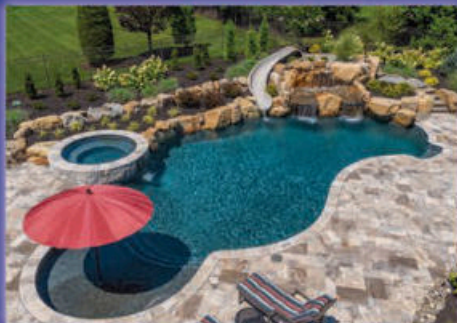
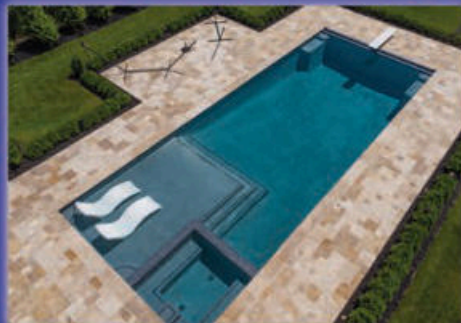
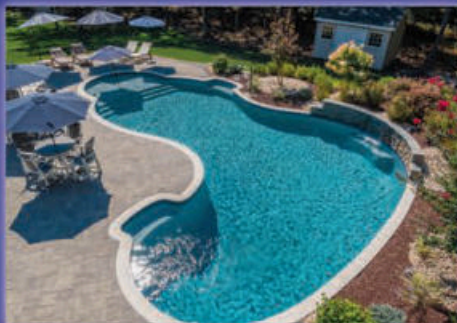
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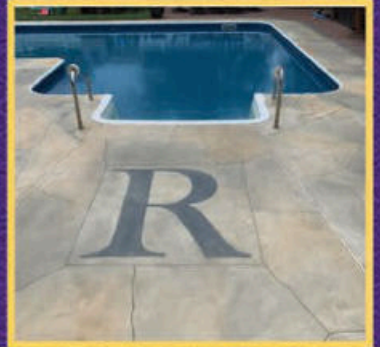
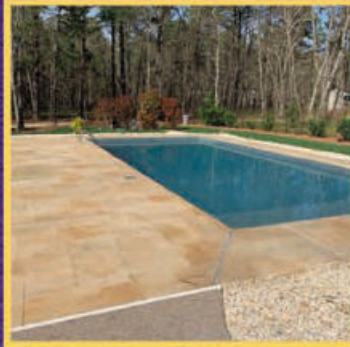
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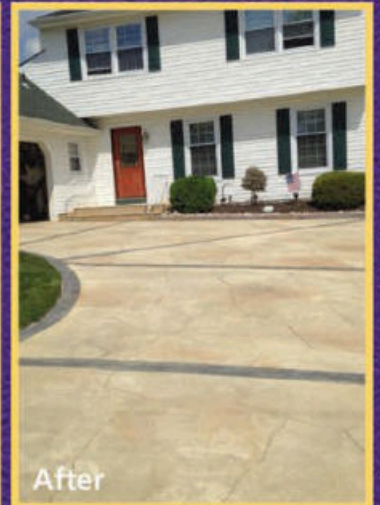
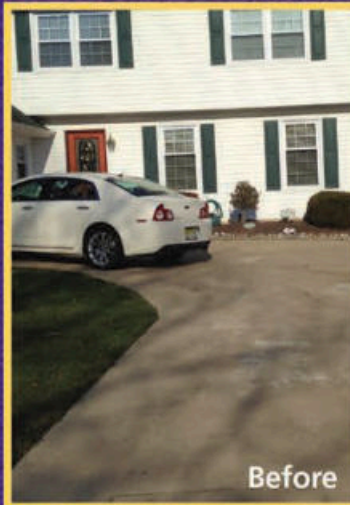
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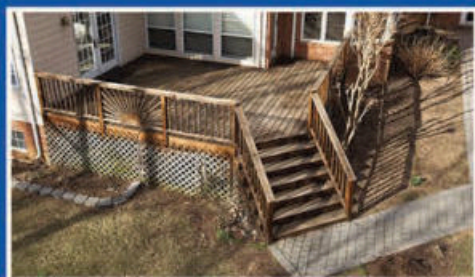


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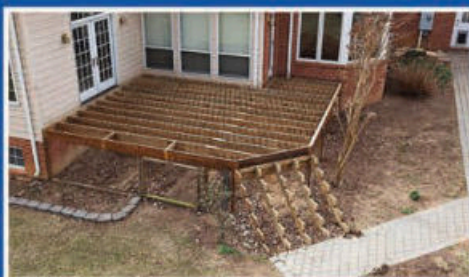
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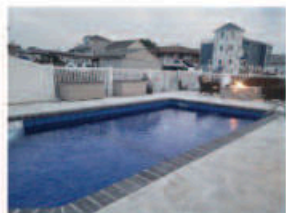
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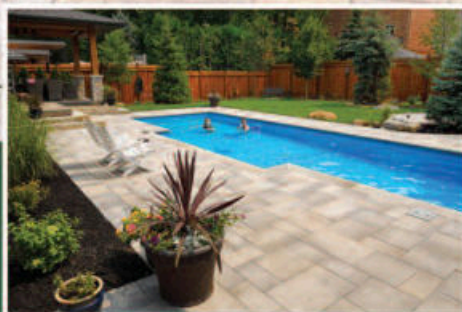
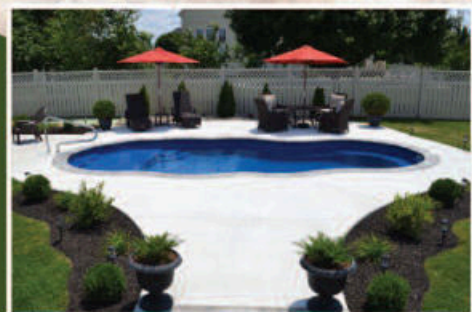
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Fresh Flooring

by Peter Proko

WHEN IT COMES TO CHOOSING YOUR NEXT FLOOR, THERE'S PLENTY TO CONSIDER BASED ON USAGE, LIFESTYLE AND OTHER FACTORS.



ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TAKE A LOOK AROUND YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD TO NOTICE THAT HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS CONTINUE TO BE ON THE RISE. Ever since the pandemic forced folks to spend more time inside the four walls of their home, renovation has become top of mind for many as they look to transform their space and make it more functional for today's lifestyle. But no matter if you're having the kitchen of your dreams built, updating an outdated bathroom or perhaps finishing the basement, all of these projects have one thing in common: the need to choose the right flooring.

When it comes to flooring options these days, there is no shortage of styles to choose from, whether you're looking to add fresh carpeting, lay down some hardwood or add luxury vinyl plank to freshen your design.

Choosing the right style largely boils down to a matter of preference, but one should also make an informed choice based on surrounding lifestyle factors. Do you have small children? What about pets? Are you looking to update the floors in a high-traffic area? By discussing these factors with a professional, they can determine which style of floors best suits your home.

"Talking with the customer to find out their needs, asking questions and educating them on the options available is necessary to help them make the best choice for their flooring project," says Jeff Stirling, owner of Creative Floors and More.

"Lifestyle is a huge factor," agrees Mike Junker, manager, Maro's Floor Covering. "Active families with pets are best served with waterproof, easy-to-clean vinyl floors or lower pile, more durable carpet in the most lived-in areas like family rooms and basements."

We spoke with Stirling, Junker and more of the region's leading flooring experts to get a better sense of what homeowners need to consider before making the right

choice for their household.

On the Carpet

When it comes to carpeting, Stirling says plush is the most popular style choice, but admits there are patterns in a low pile that sell quite well, too. "It's really a personal preference," he says, before cautioning that a homeowner needs to read between the lines when it comes to the different grades of carpeting available.

"Homeowners should be wary of low pricing in carpet, and really all flooring products," Stirling says. "If the price is low, the quality is low and it will not last."

Junker also offers careful words of advice for those in the market for new car-

peting, namely with regard to paying attention to how the carpet is constructed.

"Homeowners should consider the fiber that different types of carpets are made of. Nylon, wool and polyester can all be good choices, depending on desired appearance, durability and cost," he says.

And because the carpeting in your living area can take more abuse than the rarely walked-on carpet in a guest room, it may be wise to opt for higher-grades in the spaces that are more heavily used.

"Higher-end carpet is a great choice for stairs and hallways, and often family rooms, where durability and visual impact is desired. [Alternatively], bedrooms and basements are often areas where a mid-grade

Fresh Flooring

Stoltzfus adds that he's seeing customers continuing to gravitate toward plush carpeting, but acknowledges other styles also have their place.

"The trend I see is customers mostly choosing plush carpets, but more multi-colored options rather than a solid color. We do sell some pattern carpets, but it kind of seems like people either love them or hate them," he says.

Walk the Plank

Of course, carpeting is not desired by everyone. In fact, many prefer the warmth of hardwood floors, or the convenience and aesthetic appeal of luxury vinyl in areas like the living room, kitchen and dining room. Some others may opt for laminate or porcelain tiles in bathroom areas and so on.

Gilmar Marcelino, owner of Victorian Floor Finishing, has been in the business since 2009 and has installed his fair share of hardwood floors over the years. But he's also been a trusted resource when a homeowner is looking to have their existing floors refinished. Not only will it clean and help further protect the floor, but it also gives homeowners the opportunity to change the stain. This is particularly desired when a homeowner recently purchased the residence and is looking to add their own touches to the house or perhaps during the move they ripped up old carpeting

to be replaced and happily discovered a hardwood floor underneath.

"The main purpose of sanding [down to the bare wood] is that when we remove all finishing, we can apply any kind of color or stain available," says Marcelino. "A homeowner is always looking to update the color of the floor to match the kitchen cabinets, match with some furniture or with new paint on the walls. That's the majority of the reasons why the customer goes through with sanding and finishing the floor. It brings [the floor] to life and makes it look brand new."

And perhaps the most talked-about flooring these days is luxury vinyl plank. It's being utilized in rooms throughout the house and is attractive because of its color options, durability and affordability.

"Luxury vinyl plank is by far the most popular choice these days," says Stoltzfus. "It has the lead over other types of flooring by a pretty good margin. There are a large amount of different styles and colors available."

"Luxury vinyl tile has grown in popularity with homeowners for many reasons. Recent advances have allowed the patterns and

carpet can make sense" says Junker.

Elmer Stoltzfus, owner of Heritage Floors, says homeowners should not only consider quality carpeting when making their selection, but also make sure they are choosing high-quality padding for underneath as well.

"Padding is very important. The thought that a carpet is only as good as the padding underneath it is not entirely accurate, but it's close," he says.

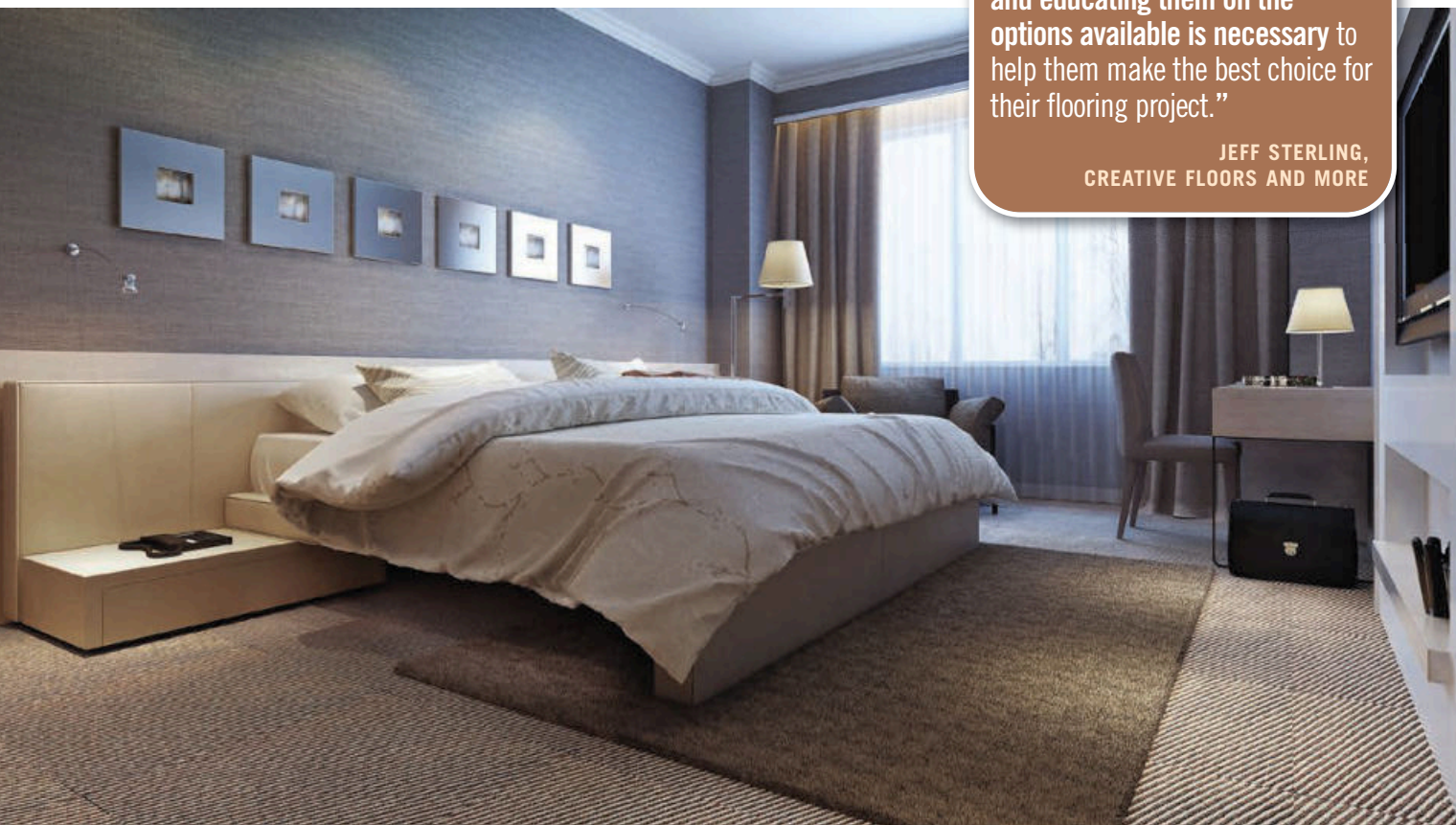
When it comes to color choices, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. While neutral tones remain the primary choice for many who look to seamlessly blend multiple elements of the home, some are opting for multi-toned patterns that offer their own look and appeal.

"Multi-colored textured patterns are extremely popular for all areas of the house, especially in high-traffic areas. ... Neutral tones will always be popular, but stripe patterns are also very [in demand] right now," says Junker.



Talking with the customer to find out their needs, asking questions and educating them on the options available is necessary to help them make the best choice for their flooring project."

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feel of real wood to be replicated on vinyl plank/tile. This has allowed modern [vinyl flooring] to be not only durable, but also beautiful. In addition to this, the ease of installation has made it a rising star in residential flooring," says Anthony Sterl, of Sterl Kitchens Co. Inc.

"It's a great floor that has been on the market for a while and it doesn't look like it's going anywhere because everybody likes it," adds Marcelino.

In addition to attributes like being waterproof and free of scratches, luxury vinyl is designed to last. For instance, the flooring carried at Sterl Kitchens is actually rated for light commercial use. "That means it is much heavier than what is used in residential [properties]," says Sterl. "Our flooring also has at least a 30-year warranty and depending on the product, some may have a lifetime warranty."

Marcelino has seen his clients install luxury vinyl in a wide variety of spaces on the first floor, the second floor, in sunrooms, etc. "Today you can get the oak look, a pine look, a cherrywood look; I see all kinds and it looks like real hardwood," he says. "And the maintenance is much less. Even if you have a pet or small kids, you have nothing to worry about because that floor is meant to last a long time. ... I haven't done any replacements for existing homeowners because of issues with [a vinyl] floor."

No matter which floor suits your style and preference, homeowners are best served to find a trusted professional to help guide them in their selection. And as is the case with

most things in life, you get what you pay for, and sacrificing quality to save a few dollars could wind up proving more costly in the long run.

"All flooring products are not equal," says Stirling. "There are many different qualities of flooring in each category. This means different price points as well. Low price and quality do not go hand in hand. Homeowners should keep this in mind when shopping for flooring."

H&H



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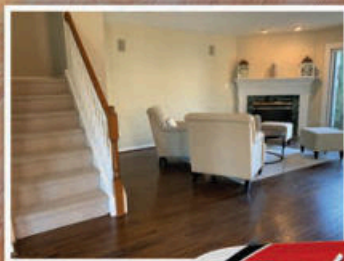


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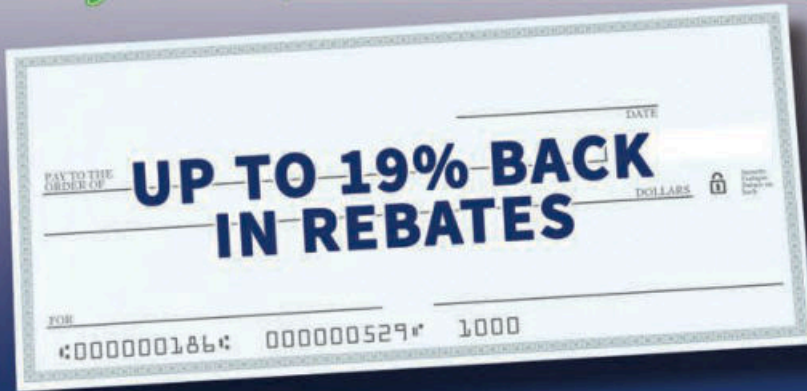


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Building Relationships

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**



OUTDOOR ESSENTIALS

The right type of fence can be the finishing touch on a beautiful backyard, but homeowners should understand the pros and cons of different materials.

by **Matt Cosentino**

There is perhaps no more exciting realm of home improvement than the outdoor living space, whether plans include a resort-style pool, beautiful landscaping or a covered deck with a fully loaded kitchen and bar area. One aspect that is not always top of mind but is equally important as the bells and whistles is the type of fence that surrounds it all.

Homeowners may have different reasons for installing a fence on their property, and recognizing their priorities goes a long way in determining the style and type they should

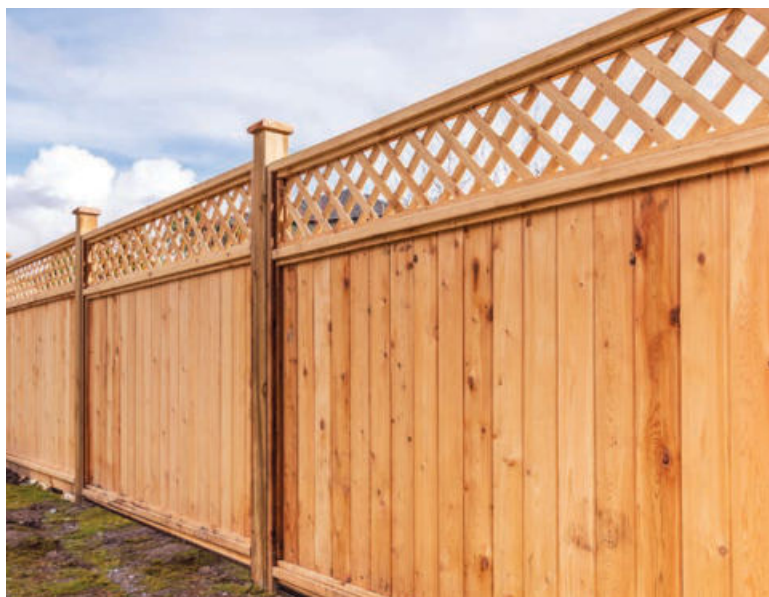
ultimately choose.

“More often than not a homeowner is looking for a fence because of pets and children, and these days I feel like more pools are going in than ever before, so once a pool is in the equation a fence becomes mandatory,” says Robert Hook of Progressive Fence & Railing, located at the Jersey Shore. “Privacy is also a huge factor for most folks, which is why the vast majority of fencing you will continue to see is [6-foot-high] privacy. Most customers want something that is low maintenance, but they also want some-

thing strong that can stand up to the abuse of the wind and elements, which is extremely key when working [on] one of the islands in South Jersey.”

The popularity of home improvement shows on television and the influence of social media mean that homeowners are often more educated than in the past, but meeting with a professional fence contractor can certainly provide even more valuable information.

“A lot of times, especially nowadays, people know what they’re interested in, what type of fence or style,” says Tom Hibbs of



Great Valley Fence. “But I will guide them through the process depending on if they need more privacy, if they prefer more of an open look, if they’re concerned about pets or kids. ... Most [towns] have adopted the international pool code, which is called the BOCA code. Anybody who has a pool or is thinking about getting a pool down the road would want the fence to meet that code, so that’s something I also make sure to mention.”

House & Home spoke to several local professionals to learn more about the factors to consider when shopping for a fence, the different types on the market and why customers lean to certain kinds over others.

Vinyl is final

Over the past decade or two, many residential neighborhoods in the Northeast have become dotted with white vinyl fencing. The appeal lies with the durability and low maintenance required of the material.

“Most of our jobs are vinyl,” says Danny Leslie of Superior Fence & Railing. “It’s maintenance free, it doesn’t rot, it doesn’t have splits, it doesn’t have cracks like wood, it’s easier to pressure-wash once a year than staining wood, and it looks good too. It comes in different colors—white, tan, adobe, gray—and we have a wood-grain vinyl. ... Are you going to keep getting someone to stain your [wooden] fence or replace a post when it’s cracked? Buy vinyl, it’s final.”

Hook agrees that vinyl is the go-to option for most customers and will continue to be because people do not want to spend the time and money to care for a fence made of other materials, such as wood. He also sees the colors and decorative elements improving each year.

“Colored and wood-grain vinyls have been around for quite some time actually, but there are always new additions being added by our suppliers,” he says. “There are definitely some newer and very popular styles that have emerged in the past few years such as horizontal privacy and horizontal semi-privacy fencing. It’s a very nice and

subtle change from a typical fence using vertical boards or pickets, so it catches your eye.

“There is definitely a big demand right now for almost anything that is slightly different than the norm, whether that is changing the style and specs of the typical fence, mixing and matching colors and even slightly different materials into the equation. There are so many variations when it comes to vinyl, you really have almost unlimited options to choose from.”

Hibbs adds that fencing that makes the property stand out is popular at the moment, though it may come with a higher price tag.

“Some people will get different colors but a lot of times it comes down to cost,” he says. “There are standard color upgrades—like beige, gray or clay—that won’t be nearly as expensive as a custom color. But if they want a custom color to match the siding of their house, for example, like brown, green or orange, those colors can be done but it’s a lot more expensive.”

“Wood grain is another possibility, but that’s going to be on the expensive side too. They have wood grain finishes like mahogany, walnut and a natural color.”

Even with those possibilities, the downside of vinyl is that it may not fit as nicely with the natural beauty of the landscape. But in the end, the low-maintenance factor usually seems to win out, and Hibbs offers a suggestion for cleaning a vinyl fence.

“I actually don’t recommend powerwashing,” he says. “It’s a lot softer on the PVC to just use a hose or to hand-wash it with environmentally friendly soap and just wipe it down. They will get some grass and dirt on them, but if you powerwash, it could actually affect the integrity of the outside of the PVC. ... It’s actually a petroleum-based product, so if you powerwash the outside you could create pores in the material that would promote mold growth.”

Complementing the natural beauty

Leslie often finds that customers in wooded areas prefer fences made from spruce or cedar because of



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their ability to blend with the natural surroundings of the property. Hibbs agrees but warns that unlike years past, wooden fences are not much cheaper than vinyl, if at all.

"It offers the natural look but lumber is still more expensive right now," he says. "Ten or 20 years ago, because they were still refining PVC and getting used to it as a fence product, PVC was a lot more expensive than cedar. But since the pandemic, lumber prices went up. Some of the standard lumber, like pressure-treated, spruce or fir, those prices came down, but cedar is still relatively expensive."

Hook believes there is a market for wood fences, however, and has started to see the prices get better the further we move away from the pandemic.

"Wood fencing in my opinion has actually come back in a big-time way, at least in the areas that I work in," he says. "You've had years and years of nothing but vinyl seemingly popping up, but the real-



ity is that a beautiful cedar fence may simply match a customer's home and property infinitely better than vinyl will.

"Unfortunately, the market and the cost of lumber has skyrocketed since the beginning of COVID, but things have already begun to normalize. And while the costs of lumber went up, nearly every other material available experienced increases that were substantial, from wood to vinyl, aluminum, steel, composites, etc. Right now, the cost of a vinyl fence versus a good-quality cedar fence is very comparable, so it will come down to how that fence accents the property and its surroundings."

Hook always recommended vinyl when he first broke into the industry about nine years ago and

still does plenty of jobs with it, but has become partial to wooden fences.

"[I]n my opinion, there is a huge market for cedar fencing and other hardwoods such as ipe, which when completed and maintained, simply cannot be matched aesthetically," he says. "Of course, it has to fit the property and the customer's home, but I have developed a true and sincere appreciation for not just the look of wood fencing, but for the time and skill involved in building it, especially when it is a custom design."

Aluminum and other options

While chain-link fencing is still heavily used in commercial applications, it is not as common in the residential space as it was 30 years ago. Black aluminum or steel fencing does have its benefits, however, and is often utilized around a pool.

"One of the largest pros for both aluminum and steel is that the fencing is very un-obstructive to your view," Hook says. "Very often it is used surrounding a pool where the customer may already have a

fence on their property line, but then the aluminum is installed immediately around the pool as a secondary line of defense for children. Since the posts and pickets are very slender, it doesn't block your view, it simply blends into the background. In many other occasions where customers have their property lines landscaped and planted heavily, well, they want their landscaping to be a highlight of the property. In those situations where privacy isn't a factor and a barrier is needed, it's the perfect solution."

Hibbs adds that just using aluminum around a pool rather than the whole property is a good way to save money, or if it is used in conjunction with a vinyl fence, it can give dogs a place to run around without getting near the pool. There are some negatives, however, particularly in a coastal setting.

"The biggest con to both is that no matter what, metal does not fare too well in a salt-air environment," Hook says. "Without a doubt, steel will eventually rust, aluminum will pit and oxidize, and

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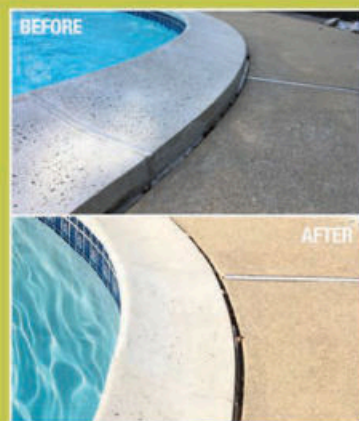
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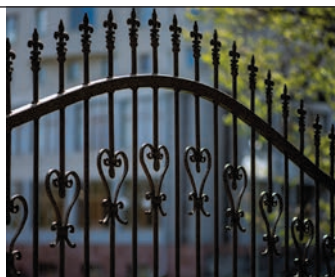
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at some point will need replacement. Now, on the plus side there are a ton of different manufacturers out there, and many offer products with substantially upgraded powder coatings that are designed for a salt-air environment. That being said, they obviously won't last forever, but is there anything on your home or property that will?"

Hibbs says split-rail fencing with welded wire can be an inexpensive option to keep smaller pets and children in the yard, and can also be used to meet pool code. He also suggests black woven wire as a way to keep other animals out.

"We've done some work like that specifically for deer enclosures," he says. "Some years ago it became a big thing to very easily put up posts and attach deer netting. But the deer would get stuck in it, so our recommendation for deer enclosures would be to go a minimum of 10 feet high and to use the woven wire, which is a very strong, agricultural-grade wire. If deer happen to run into it, they'll just bounce right off and not get snagged in it."



Finishing touches

Just like automation has been a critical piece of other systems in the home, it has carried over to fences as well. Hibbs says remote-controlled gates have become quite popular with his customers, who enjoy just being able to open and close it with the push of a button.

He has also seen some homeowners put their own personal stamp on their fences by incorporating their initials and decorative elements into the gate or adding finials to the pickets.

Whatever the project might entail, if the goal is to get a fence installed in time for summer, it's important to act quickly.

"If someone is thinking about getting a fence, they should definitely be shopping around now,

because the longer they wait between now and June, the busier any fence company is going to get," Hibbs says. "It tends to slow down in the fall ... but March through June is definitely when I fill the schedule out pretty fast."

Leslie stresses the importance of finding a company with the best warranties on materials and labor. And while some handy homeowners may think they can tackle the fence installation themselves, it's probably best left to a professional, Hook adds, because of issues like grade changes, working around irrigation and landscaping, and drilling through masonry.

"There is an awful lot that goes into a fence installation, whether most folks realize it or not, and it's a very difficult thing to get right without proper experience," Hook says. "Plus, if you decide to do the work yourself and a warranty issue arises because you didn't install the materials properly, then you're going to be out of luck. A company like ours is an authorized distributor and installer of these products so not only do we warranty our



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"James Hardie siding gives homeowners the look of real wood siding without the maintenance or inspection problems," he continues. "James Hardie siding elevates your home in a way that vinyl siding simply cannot."

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tions, including Infinity Windows from Marvin, they can handle your entire renovation from top to bottom, thanks to their high-quality, in-demand metal roofing installation.

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If your home is due for exterior renovations, Parnes advises not to delay. "Planning your renovation ahead of time is always the way to go." **H&H**

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When you need work done on your home—expected or not—you want to know that you can trust the contractor you’ve hired to get the job done well. After all, you’re not an expert on what’s involved in services like roofing, siding or windows and you don’t want to get taken advantage of as a result. Because of that, it’s important to choose a company that you can feel confident is reputable.

But how exactly do you know a company can be trusted?

One important factor in choosing the best contractor is longevity. Only a company that performs great work is going to be able to stick around for the long haul. That’s exactly the case with Emmons Roofing & Siding, a company that has been offering expert care for South Jersey and the Jersey Shore area since 1996. They are a well-known name in the region—and for good reason. Their success was built upon a reputation of honesty, integrity and good work.

In fact, the company is an Owens Corning™ Platinum Preferred Contractor. That’s not a designation that any old company can have. Platinum Preferred Contractors are in the top tier of a premier network of roofing professionals. In order to achieve this title, they must have passed a work-

manship inspection, been professionally screened for financial stability and customer service, and continue to adhere to stringent guidelines set forth by Owens Corning. Fewer than 1% of roofing contractors in the United States are Owens Corning Platinum Preferred.

“It’s a title that backs up our already strong reputation,” says Stephanie Kelly, co-owner of the company along with her husband Matthew. “Only the most reputable companies are able to earn that designation.”

Besides being able to feel confident that you’ve hired a contractor you can trust, this designation benefits homeowners in a more tangible way as well. That’s because Platinum Preferred Contractors are able to offer 50-year warranties on their work—much longer than other companies can offer. According to Owens Corning’s website, “because we stand behind these warranties, we need to make sure that we are backing up the best roofers in the business.”

AN INSIDE LOOK

And while Emmons are trusted experts you can count on for your exterior projects, their skilled interior remodeling team has also built up a solid reputation thanks to its more than 30 years of experience providing fine craftsmanship and exceptional

customer service.

In fact, the family-owned company has grown, as several talented remodeling industry professionals have recently joined Emmons to help serve its more than 6,000 existing customers.

And Emmons’ interior expertise is not limited to kitchens and bathrooms, as they also provide full-service remodeling and construction services for additions, interior renovations, porches, decks, windows, doors and basement finishing. The design team works with clients as a trusted advisor to help them make the right decisions on products, materials, colors and selections using a proprietary Curated Design Concept, which is an industry first. It’s an easy way to quickly get a custom-designed project without the heavy cost of a design-build process.

It’s all part of the company’s desire to make remodeling one’s home easy and affordable with exceptional financing programs and realistic pricing. The high level of expertise that Emmons brings to each and every project is backed by a 5-year warranty and a lifetime service guarantee, further illustrating why they continue to be leaders in the field.

CHOOSING WISELY

At the end of the day, your choice in finding the right contractor can be the difference between good, quality work and a big headache. Kelly says that the last thing Emmons wants to see is people in their local community get taken advantage of by unscrupulous roofing, siding and window contractors.

“You should be able to feel confident that you’ve chosen a contractor that you can trust—not one that is going to leave you with problems to fix after they’ve gone,” she says. “At Emmons, you are not only investing in a new roof, new siding or new windows—you’re investing in peace of mind.” **H&H**

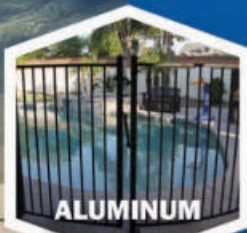
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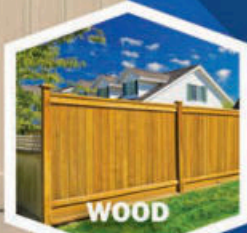




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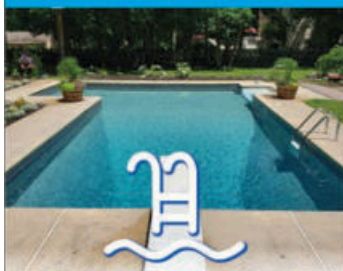
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The Backyard Experts

From pavers and pools to decks and landscaping, working with the talented team at Evergreen Pros means that you can have it all with just one call.

by Madeleine Maccar

A year before the pandemic, Evergreen Pros could not find a pool company for a customer's backyard transformation. The South Jersey company had already expanded from the landscaping and curbscaping that defined its earliest days four decades ago, able to deliver everything from pavers, outdoor kitchens and hardscaping to fencing, decks and landscaping, but hadn't yet added pools to their areas of expertise.

The solution, of course, was to keep expanding their suite of services and enriching their in-house talent.

"We were getting together with a client and going over project planning about four years ago, and we could not get a pool company to show up," recalls Nick Erman, Evergreen's co-owner. "So I ended up going to school to learn how to become a fiberglass pool installer."

Resolving a problem both proactively and with education is, Erman observes, pretty on-brand for Evergreen and its determination to go above and beyond for its residential and commercial clientele.

"The whole point of us turning into a pool company was that we didn't want to lose the customer who's looking to have this beautiful backyard oasis but we're stalled at the pool," he says. "We decided to strictly do fiberglass pools because they're less maintenance, less of a worry for the client 10, 20 years down the line, and warranted for life."

It's a business philosophy befitting a company

that thrives on being truly comprehensive backyard experts, walking with the client every step of the way from design conception to site cleanup, all performed by its own hand-picked team.

"No one wants to be calling 10 different contractors so, whether we're putting in a pool, patio, kitchen, irrigation, all the way down to planting the sod, it's a one-stop shop," Erman explains. "From the irrigation to the pavers to the shrubs, you're dealing with one person, the main project manager, through the entire project."

It's not just convenience and streamlined communication that the Evergreen team offers by being total backyard experts, though: It's harmonious, thoughtful design and far-ranging expertise, too.

And while Erman is proud of the talent comprising Evergreen's team—one so comprehensively assembled that the only subcontractors it calls in are plumbers and technicians—they never rest on their laurels. A constantly changing industry that's always touting new trends and technology means that ongoing education is critical.

"Our guys are trained every year through certifications," he affirms, noting accomplishments like Evergreen being named an Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute-certified paver installer. "We're very much up on today's building techniques with installing pavers, pools and porcelain, all the way to building fireplaces and firepits and everything else. That continuing ed-

ucation for our workers makes sure they're at today's level with their installation techniques."

An education-first approach extends to Evergreen's clients, too. The two stores it's opening soon—one for pavers and porcelain; the other, a retail shop showcasing the products customers can choose from—will provide an up-close, hands-on opportunity to interact with and compare project materials, while bringing pool clients directly to their fiberglass pools manufacturer ensures proactive involvement.

"We're very big on educating our customers," says Erman. "Not only do we educate them on the pools themselves and why they should choose fiberglass, but we educate them on what this body of water needs to be taken care of, including the chemistry involved. ... We even take them to the facility and we show them the pool actually being made."

After all, being at the top of their game means nothing without earning clients' trust, which Erman, who spent 27 years in law enforcement, knows all too well.

"There's a loyalty and a trust factor: People know they can get scammed by contractors, so we tell them right upfront that we're prior law enforcement, all we know is trust, honesty and integrity," he says. "People don't give us access to their homes because we're contractors, they're giving us that access because they know where we were employed in the past."

That integrity also means working with any budget. Not wanting to deny any homeowner the joys of a lovingly designed and stunningly executed backyard, three- to five-year installation plans offer an affordable process that locks in the project price at the time the order is made. Additionally, the team will tap its far-reaching relationships throughout the home improvement industry to "surround clients with our network" and connect them with qualified, well-vetted contractors outside of Evergreen's expertise.

Because for the Evergreen team, customer service that dazzles is all part of delivering the "Wow!" factor they strive for with every job.

"If the client isn't satisfied, I'm not satisfied," says Erman. "We want the husband and wife to both have tears in their eyes because they're so happy. It has to be everything they've ever dreamed of." **H&H**

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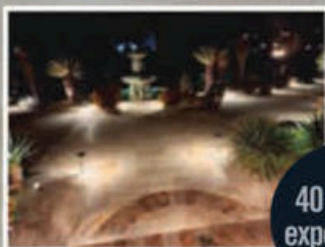
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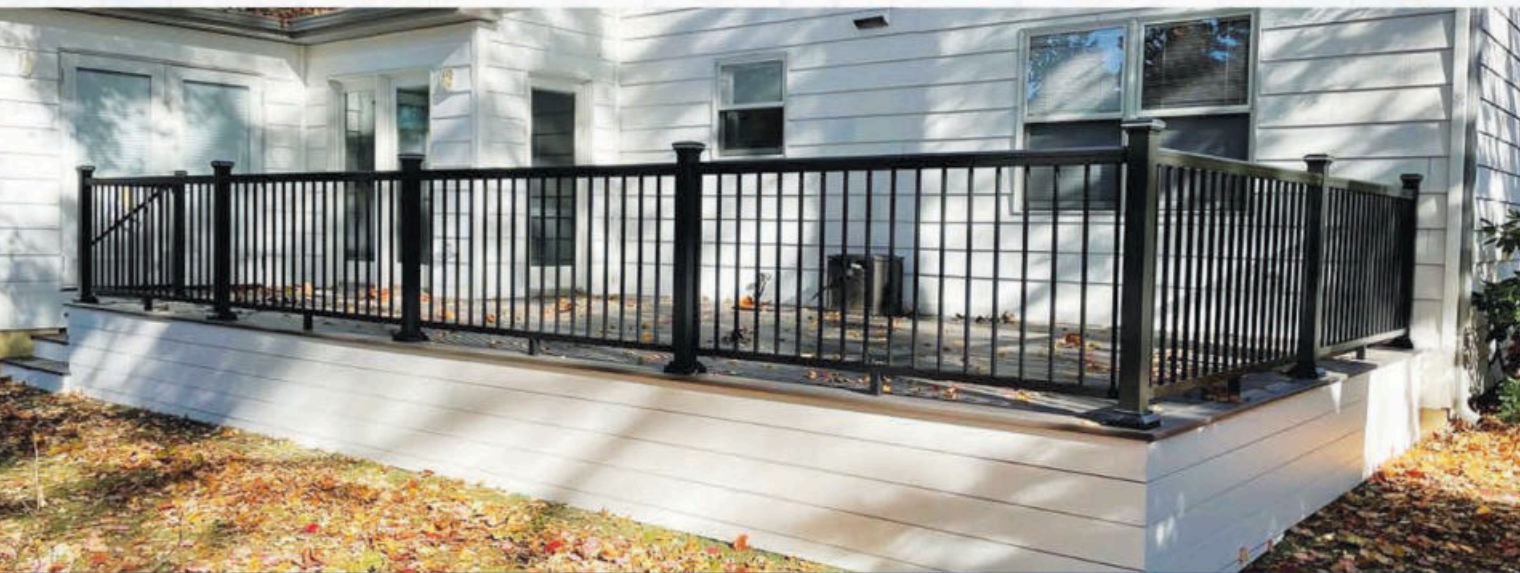
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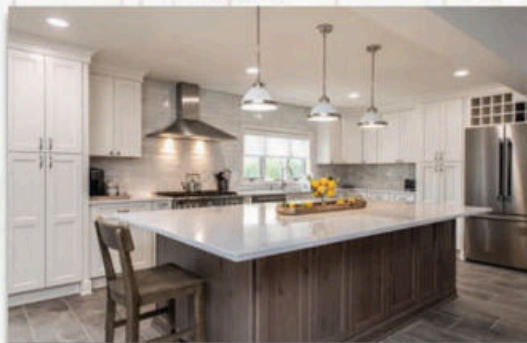


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