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Volume 21, Issue 8

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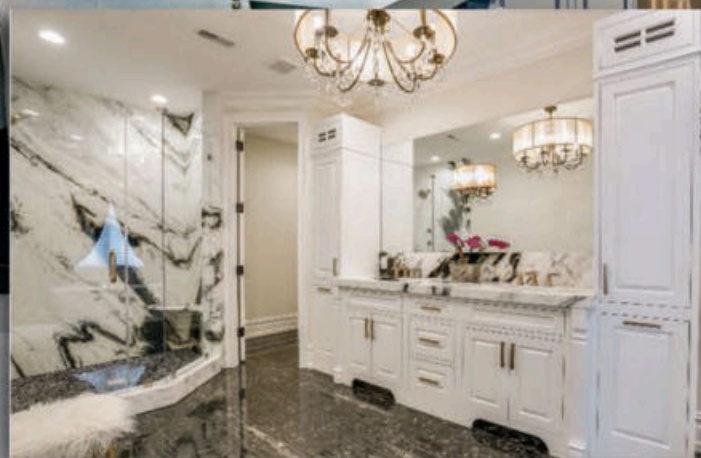
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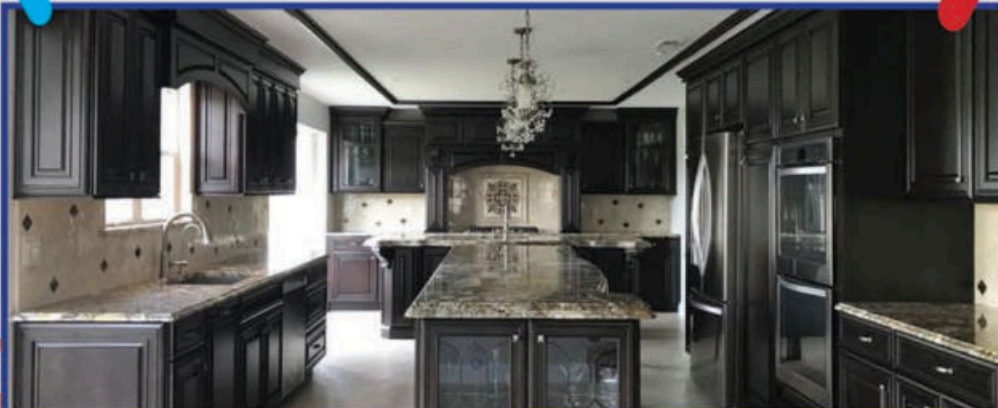
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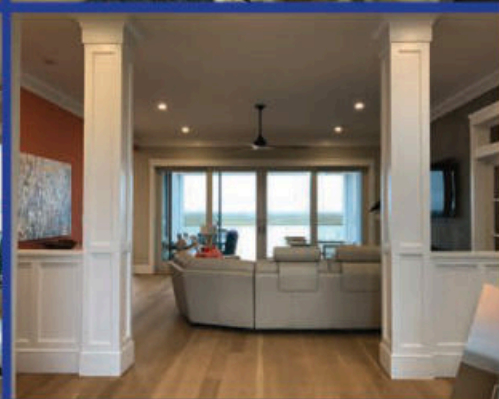
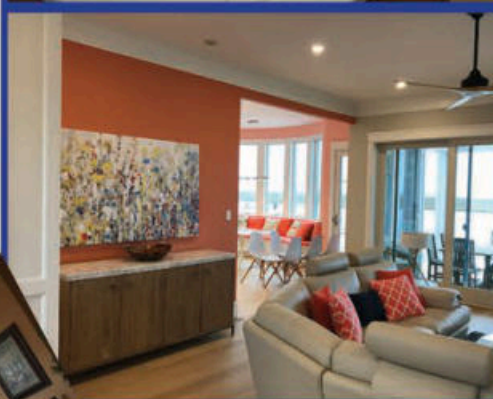
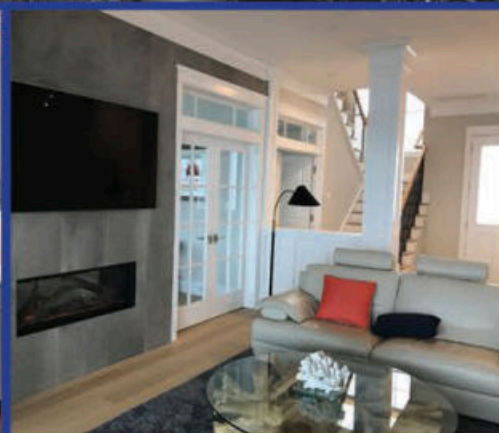
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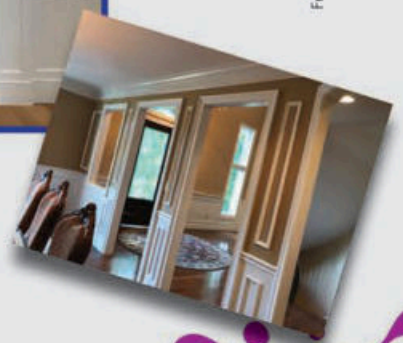


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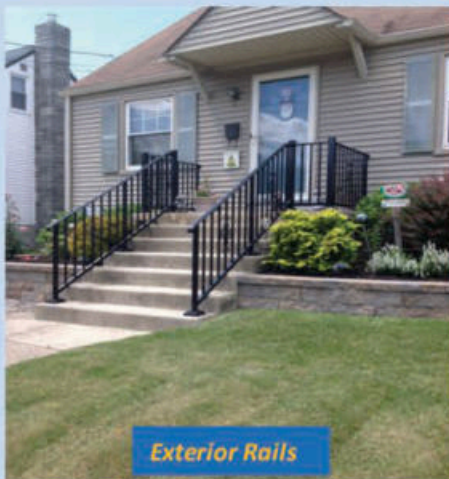
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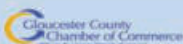
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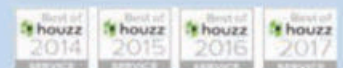
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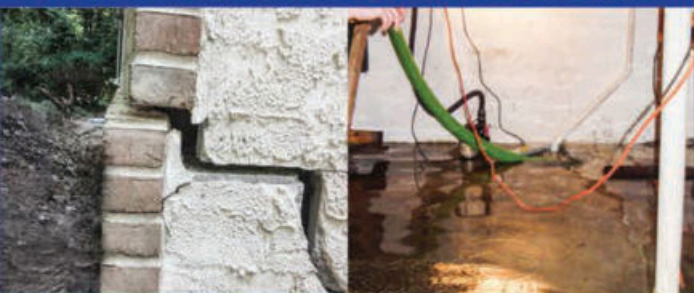


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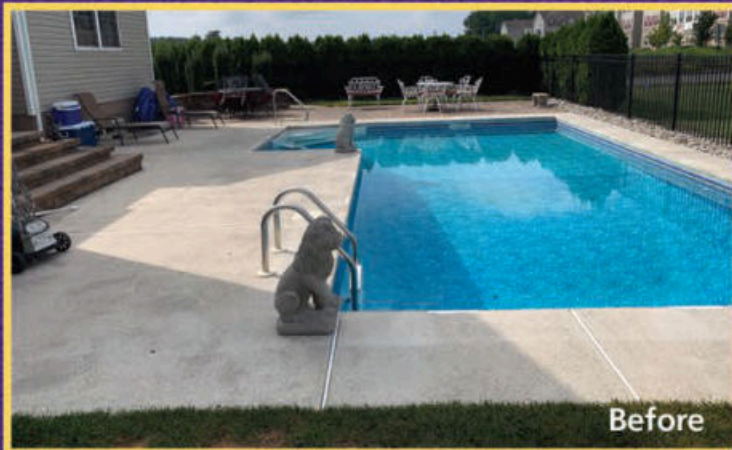
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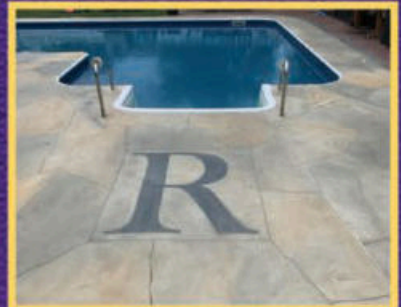
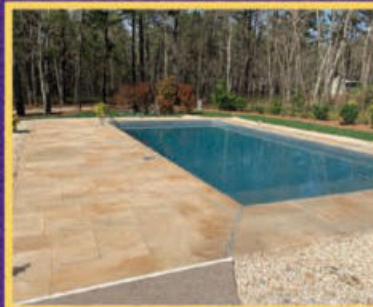
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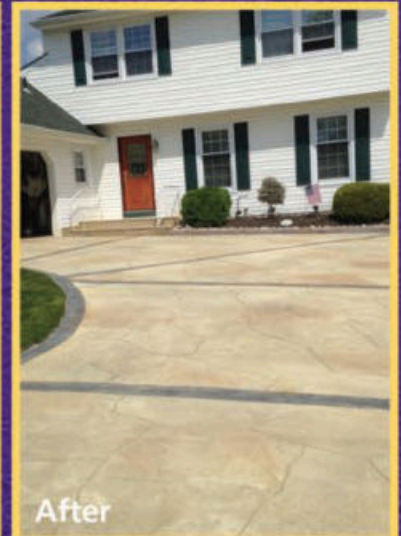
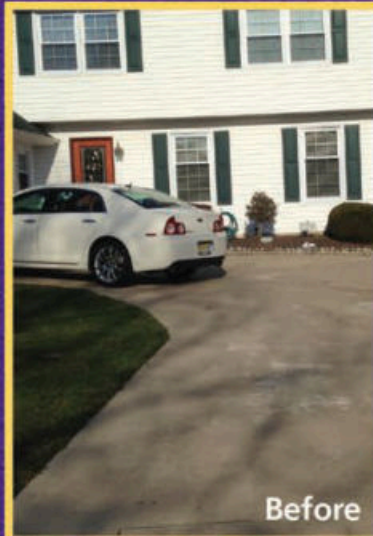


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YOUR GREAT OUTDOORS

With temperatures and vaccination rates rising, residents are looking to create deeply personalized

entertainment spaces and luxurious retreats

right in their own backyards.

BY MADELEINE MACCAR

With the weather getting warmer and vaccines making many more comfortable with gatherings, thoughts are naturally turning to outdoor living spaces.

Some are planning to host enough summer barbecues to make up for last year's lost time while others want to create an idyllic outdoor living space. Some have responded to more than a year at home zeroing in on what to change inside and out, while others are making their backyards cozier, more inviting retreats.

No matter what, experts agree that the pandemic is driving decisions about outdoor spaces this year. The variables come from how that manifests itself per homeowners' tastes, feelings, income or savings, family situations and more.

Whether you're just updating your patio's color scheme or finally decided it's time for that backyard revamp you've been toying with for years, experts are here to help create your outdoor eden.

Be Aware of Shortages

Before you begin, whether you're buying, building or breaking ground, know that you may encounter the material shortages plaguing property owners and municipalities alike throughout the pandemic. Even if one supplier has ample in-house supply,

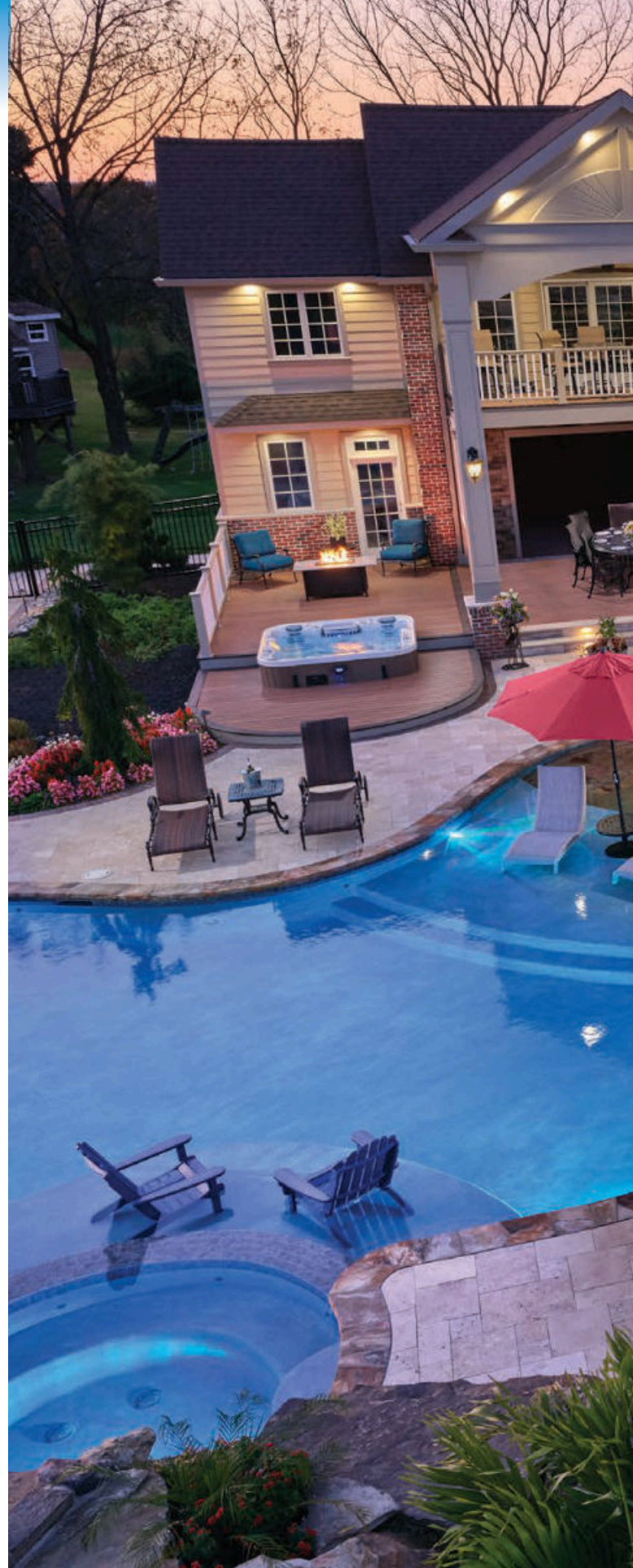


Image courtesy of Sequoia Out Back



“

The pandemic has had a huge effect on the creation of idyllic, multifunctional backyard escapes.”

YOUR GREAT OUTDOORS

special orders and third-party partners might create delays.

John Keller, whose Sequoia Out Back offers a range of customized outdoor options from deck construction to railing to hard-scaping design to furniture, has the advantage of seeing trends from an array of angles. Getting ahead of shortages helped Sequoia's Hatfield, Pennsylvania, location and showroom stay well stocked, but customers should be aware that any seemingly infinite demand eventually has an impact. And the past few months have been filled with projects.

Keller advises homeowners that "time is of the essence" if they're looking to complete projects in 2021.

"We specialize in the outdoor living area as a whole and the challenge has been getting those products," he says. "We currently have a lot of inventory because of our place in the market, but the demand is so high that it could run out."

Those who want a project completed within a certain time frame might have to rely on what's in stock now rather than a special order that would delay a summer project potentially until the fall.

"People have been taking what we have because the lead times for special orders have been so long," he says.

The Comfort of the Indoors Outside

More than one unified trend, people are looking for ways to extend their indoor living space outdoors.

"One of the new things people are really focusing on is comfort, especially since technology has made outdoor furniture and especially cushions more comfortable," says



Bobby Huber of Oskar Huber Furniture & Design. "Some outdoor furniture used to look pretty but it wasn't always the most comfortable: Now, they can get the best of both worlds. People want a more luxurious experience, like creating a second living room or dining room, but outside."

Huber, representing the fourth generation of the Oskar Huber family, jokes that he's been in the industry his entire life. But it's given him perspective on how industry trends are influenced by outside factors.

Huber and Keller agree that the pandemic has a huge effect on the creation of idyllic, multifunctional backyard escapes while keeping in mind that not everyone is comfortable with indoor gatherings yet. And you need a solid foundation for an outdoor enclave, though, which is where many projects start.

"We're seeing a ton of

decking projects because of how COVID has affected outdoor living," Keller affirms. "We have a lot of different products from a lot of different manufacturers for a lot of different budgets because it all comes down to what each customer wants."

Huber also sees that current outdoor design as driven largely by individual tastes.

"It's an outdoor living space with lighting, area rugs for the outdoors, outside pillows, you can really add all the 'jewelry' and nice accents you want," he says.

Durable Doesn't Mean Drab

Gone are the days of uninspired outdoor accessories that don't look like much but can withstand the elements or are more ornamental than functional. Durable furniture, building materials and decorations have benefited from modern materials, aesthetics and expectations giving sturdy items a much-needed makeover.

Since some outdoor overhauls aren't on a permanent residence but rather a second property, it's important to consider how extreme weather or salty sea air can affect the looks and lifespan of outdoor furniture, fixtures and features.

There are different grades for outdoor

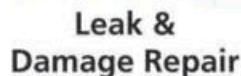


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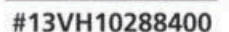


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offerings, so it's important to ask about and really understand what you're purchasing as you consider up-front price and expected longevity.

Two materials Huber highly praises are the recycled plywood as well as the "marine-grade polymer" and coated aluminum frames of a line called Telescope, especially for those outfitting their Shore houses for year-round outdoor furniture. He also says teak is a "really beautiful option that's been around for ages," but it does require some maintenance—unless a gradually graying patina is what you want, and plenty do.

Your Dream, Expert Guidance

Huber says experts will visit a customer's home for a complimentary on-site consultation and in-person assessment, offering as much or as little input as the client wants.

"One of the things our designers do is ask the right questions to try and figure out how the customer will be using the space: How do they want to live outside, are they going to be doing a lot of dining, do they want a big outdoor kitchen, do they need outdoor seating," Huber explains. "We let them be in the driver's seat but we'll assist in any way we can. You want to get a vibe from them, and then show them the different things they might like."

Expert advice also helps ensure a homeowner completely understands the product they're incorporating into their backyard space, as well as how to work with their budget. Having a professional eye on a living space also minimizes the possi-

bility of ill-fitting purchases, either physically or aesthetically.

"If you buy something and it's not right, that's kind of an expensive mistake," Huber says. "A lot of times, people—myself included—have difficulty designing a room for things like the layout, the spacing, the traffic flow and pattern."

People may have an idea but not a complete vision of what they want, and Keller says both professional guidance and visiting showrooms to interact with products firsthand can help ensure these big decisions don't become bigger mistakes.

"People don't necessarily know exactly what they want until they come into our 40,000-square-foot showroom, which is why the showroom is such a big benefit. You can see the building materials and the furniture itself," says Keller. "We know our products, and we can help people make the best decision for their needs." **H&H**



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LEADERS OF THE PACK

It has been more than 30 years since brothers Andrew and Jimmy DePiano made the bold move to start their own company, and **A&J Flooring Outlet** continues to set the standard in the industry.



It may not have been so obvious in the moment, but looking back now it becomes crystal clear: 1989 was a turning point in the lives of the DePiano brothers. Working at the time for an established flooring company—where Jimmy ran the day-to-day operations and younger sibling Andrew was an experienced installer—they easily could have been content to stay the course and likely would have carved out long, successful careers in the industry. But they had loftier goals in mind.

“You have to be a leader, not a follower. That’s true in life as well as in business,” Jimmy DePiano says. “If you show me a follower, I’ll show you a failure.”

Armed with that mantra, and the belief that they could offer customers the vast knowledge, affordable prices and pleasant experience they deserved, the brothers confidently took the leap to venture out on their own and founded A&J Flooring Outlet. More than three decades later, the company continues to set the benchmark for quality in carpet, hardwood flooring and much more.

Although DePiano jokes that working with his brother at times feels about as enjoyable as a trip to the dentist, in fact they have formed a fruitful professional relationship, leaned on each other during challenging times

like the Great Recession of 2007 and built a well-known brand throughout New Jersey and beyond. DePiano’s son, also named Jimmy, is part of the business as well, having worked his way up from installer to a leadership position.

“We are a true family business,” DePiano says. “I’ve been doing this since I was 18 and I turn 64 this year. We’ve had our company for 30 years, and each year has gotten better and better and better.”

The brothers were putting in 12-hour days in the early years of the company but it did not take long to develop a team behind them they could trust. One of their employees has been with them from the beginning, while most have been on board for 15, 20 or even 25 years.

From showroom staff who know the products inside and out to expert installers, A&J is able to make every step of the process as stress-free as possible for residential and commercial customers.

“I don’t care who you are or what you own, you’re only as good as your employees are,” DePiano says. “If they’re incompetent, your company is going to suffer—it’s that simple. You have to have confidence that your team is going to go out and do the job properly, and we 100% do. We don’t have any turnover here and that’s because we treat our employees the way we want to be treated.”



A&J offers the full range of flooring options from all of the leading manufacturers, including luxury vinyl tile and luxury vinyl plank, which both mimic the look of hardwood while being easier to install and maintain.

About 10 years ago, the company also branched out into kitchen and bath remodeling to meet the high demand for these services. Just as the initial move to open their own flooring business was a tremendous success for the brothers, the same can be said for the renovation side, as they can handle every aspect of the project from design to completion.

“Kitchens and bathrooms have become a big part of what we do over the past 10 years,” DePiano says. “You can only do so much with flooring; you have to grow your business in other places. That was a huge step for us and there was some opposition. Why create more headaches for yourself? But sometimes you have to take on the challenge. I know people in this business who, up to a few years ago, only sold carpeting. You can’t run a business that way; you have to diversify.”

A&J’s ability to adapt with the times and consistently prove their dedication to their customers has led to them being chosen for major jobs in local schools, offices and hospitals. They also have served multiple generations from the same family, a source of great pride for the DePiano brothers.

“I have a picture of a kid who was about 3 years old at a tent sale back at our original location. He was standing next to Barney, the big, purple dinosaur,” DePiano says. “He walked into the store about a year ago with that picture as an adult, and he bought flooring from us. People we sold carpet and hardwood to now have their grandchildren coming in to buy flooring for their own homes or condos. If you can go that many years and serve families like that, it says a lot.

“This business has been very good to us, that’s all I can say. It’s been a great ride.” **H&H**

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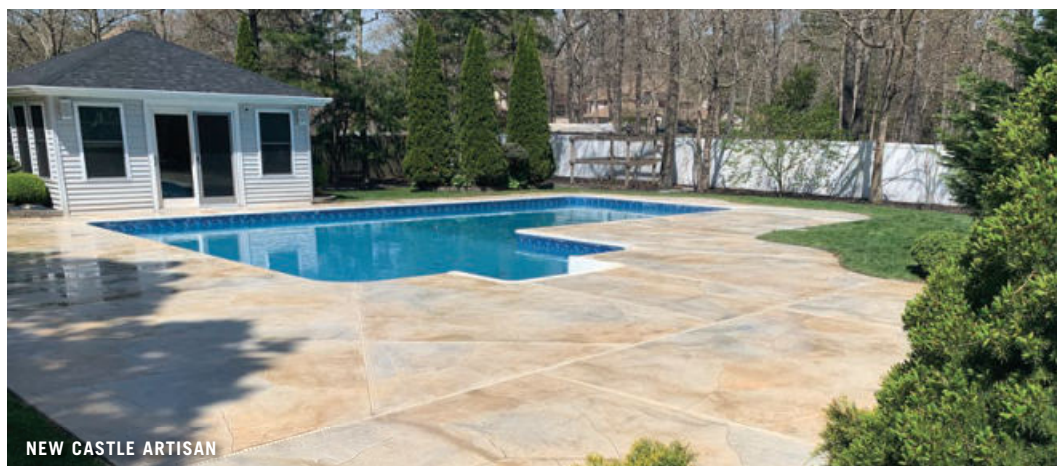
With outdoor entertaining upon us, homeowners may want to consider updating or replacing their damaged and worn-out hardscaping features.

TIME FOR ACTION

by Matt Cosentino

Although restaurants and bars are starting to operate at full capacity, amusement parks are reopening and people will be longing to take the vacations they missed out on last year, there is no question that outdoor living spaces will continue to play a crucial role in entertainment for homeowners this summer. From beautiful stone walkways that greet guests at the front of the house, to custom patios that host barbecues and parties, to pool decks that often become the focal point of a backyard, the right hardscaping feature can enhance those get-togethers and make an ordinary property extraordinary.

However, over the years these surfaces withstand a great deal of wear and tear not only from usage, but the elements and changing of the seasons. Now is an ideal time to examine the hardscaping around the home and determine if repair work or even replacement



is necessary heading into the warmer months.

“Usually in the spring everyone goes out to start unveiling their yard and assessing what needs to be done for the rebirth of summer,” says Gwen Kunkel of New Castle Artisan, which specializes in concrete resurfacing for outdoor spaces. “They do landscaping, mulching and cleanup, and then they take a look at their concrete. A lot of times after winter has come through there has been additional damage or just a tired-looking surface outside. We get very busy because of that.”

Whether homeowners are looking to begin a brand-new hardscaping project or give a

makeover to an existing one, our area is blessed with a plethora of qualified professionals. *House & Home* spoke to several of them to learn more about the options and important factors to consider.

SOLVING COMMON PROBLEMS

In some cases it is obvious that work must be done to a hardscaping feature, such as a sidewalk or walkway that has sunken and created a tripping hazard. But there are other more subtle signs to look for as well.

“You would see some cracking; that would be a symptom of a sinking slab,” says Margaret Mustin of BQ Base-

ments & Concrete. “You might see some water pooling, or worse, water going into the basement if [the hardscaping is] up against the house. If it’s a front stoop—we do a lot of those—you can see that the step is now too big, hence another tripping hazard though not as obvious as the sidewalk. Or if it’s up against the house, you can see the line starting to appear from where the concrete is sinking.”

BQ Basements & Concrete uses a system called PolyLevel to address issues of sunken or uneven concrete. Polyurethane foam is inserted into a dime-sized hole and turns from a liquid into a solid, filling the void between the eroded soil and the concrete slab,



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Before

stabilizing it and creating a flat, even surface on top. According to Mustin, the process can take as little as 20 minutes in some instances.

"It's a permanent solution, it's clean and people just love it," she says. "There's a 10-year warranty, it's environmentally friendly and you can drive a tractor trailer over it in 15 minutes. You also won't have mismatched concrete from replacing certain sections."

People also appreciate this solution because it won't break the bank, Mustin adds. "What a lot of homeowners don't know is that they don't have to replace [the slab] if it's in decent shape. We can just come and pump the foam, even it and fix the problem, which is something you can't see. It's happening underneath due to erosion or bad backfill."

New Castle Artisan also avoids replacement by using polymer concrete densifier to fix problems like cracking or pitting. The densifier is designed to absorb into the clean pores of the cement and harden, Kunkel explains, and if applied properly it will not delaminate, peel or flake. The resulting surface is not only durable, but New Castle creates an aesthetically pleasing design—such as the always-popular irregular stone pattern—to camouflage the existing cracks and add curb appeal.

"It's basically turning the repair into a remodel so you end up with value out of it as opposed to just fixing something," Kunkel says. "If you have a concrete driveway and you have a crack, and then you replace the concrete driveway you really haven't added any value to the home. But if you are able to fix that driveway and give it an updated look, then the money you are spending becomes valuable as an asset and upgrade to the property."

Not only is polymer concrete densifier beneficial for driveways and patios, but it can also be used in the area around a swimming pool.

"It's an exceptional application for pool decks for several reasons, the first one being concrete around a pool is extremely expensive to replace," Kunkel says. "It's very labor-intensive bringing concrete into someone's backyard. Our process does not damage the landscaping and there are no fences to take down. It's done with handheld tools, so there's not a lot of rip-out and mess-up."

"Finally, the application and the way it's colored and designed allows for future reparability. So if you have to get your skimmer replaced or your ladder steps replaced and they have to take out a piece of the concrete, this is something I can match up should that need arise. As I explain to people, it's a repair process that can always be spot repaired."

Yet another option is to use an epoxy-based coating system to prevent damage and extend the life of sidewalks or patios. Not only are these products

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durable and safe, they also can add aesthetic value.

"We have seven different products [that can be helpful], depending on whether you just want the finished concrete to look nice, you have medium damage like small chips or flakes, or you have major damage like big cracks," says Jason Larsen of Epoxy Floor Experts. "We pretty much have solutions for everything."

Larsen recommends a product called FlexStone for pool decks for a number of reasons, safety being at the top of the list. "It's a rubber and stone mixture that goes on about a half-inch thick," he says. "The advantage is it's porous, so when a kid gets out of the pool, the water will seep down into the rubber so it's not sitting on the surface. That way you don't have puddles everywhere, making it slippery. It's also slip resistant on the top. But if you do happen to fall, you're falling on rubber rather than falling on concrete."

FlexStone is also cool on the feet—particularly in lighter colors—

and homeowners can include designs, such as a dolphin or lettering.

Larsen suggests using a quartz or flake coating for a patio that has cracks rather than tearing it up and starting over, especially since the thawing and freezing common in this area will continue to affect the concrete. There are endless options to choose from in terms of colors.

"If you're going to spend the money, you want to accent it and make it look nice," he says. "We have so many choices that there are no popular colors—it all comes down to your personality. We have a color for every personality, that's what I like to say. Some of our customers call it 'concrete candy' or 'concrete jewelry.'"

STARTING FRESH

Steve McNamara of Custom Patios also takes a lot of calls at this time of year for people hoping he can fix the problems with their hardscaping feature. Obviously, he does everything he can to help them avoid the cost and hassle of

a complete rebuild.

"Some people just can't afford to put a new patio in," he says. "Sometimes we're able to powerwash, remove all the old sand and put in a new polymer sand and give them a little uplift. But it's really a case-by-case basis whether the patio is salvageable or not. Quite often it needs to be redone completely."

For those who require a replacement, and also clients who are finally moving forward with their dream project and installing a brand-new hardscaping element, McNamara undergoes a comprehensive planning process before designing and finally building the space. Homeowners provide pictures for inspiration and he discusses cost along with the pros and cons of a wet-laid application versus a dry-laid application.

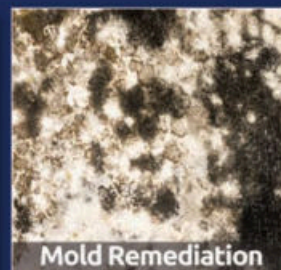
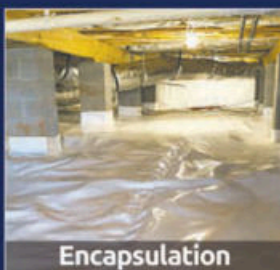
Many of the people McNamara

works with are drawn to the natural stone look, with Pennsylvania flagstone being the most commonly used.

"That's really popular," he says. "The benefits are, it's a timeless material for one—it never gets outdated. Some pavers are probably more appropriate for certain neighborhoods but for certain homes the flagstone fits the bill. We like to mix it up with brick and other materials. People like the



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natural cleft and the colors of it; you get various shades of blue, gray, some rust and lilac colors with it. With some pavers, depending on the company, some of the aggregate starts to show through over time. You don't get anything like that on the natural stone."

However, there are also many advantages to using pavers and plenty of manufacturers from which to choose. McNamara does not push any particular company on his customers, but simply presents the options and helps them make the best decision for their property and budget.

"There is a little bit more versatility with the pavers," he says. "Obviously, you have different shapes, sizes and a lot of different colors, and I think that's why a lot of people go with it. It's also a little more affordable to install.

"The manufacturing techniques have gotten better over the years. They have larger-format pavers now, which kind of mimic the size and scale of natural stone. But you're never going to get the

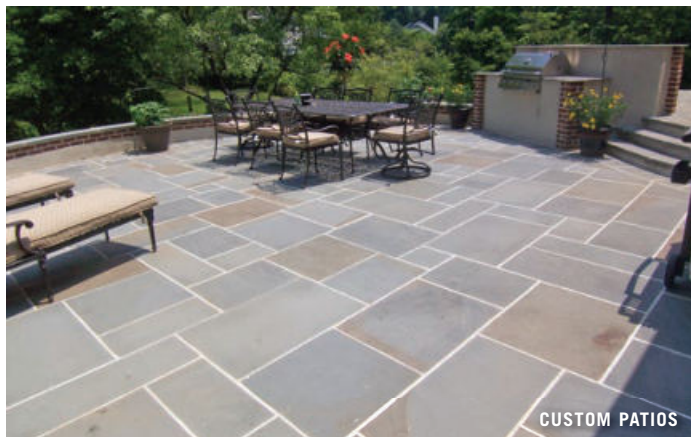
real look of natural stone unless you're using it."

Natural stone can also be used on a pool deck, with travertine being a trendy choice because it remains cooler than flagstone or pavers under the summer sun.

No matter which materials the homeowners choose for their project, McNamara is always delighted to deliver an outdoor space that will change the way they entertain.

"When we take before-and-

after pictures, people can't even believe how it turns out," he says. "You have to have a particular vision, I guess, and once you've done it for so long you end up getting pretty good at it when you design them all day long. I do have a design and architectural background so that helps. It's really nice to see people appreciate the work when it's all done. It transforms the whole property, and if it's designed properly it can really increase the value of the home." **H&H**



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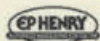
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Floors Just For You and Built Just For You Construction handle every aspect of a renovation project from start to finish, taking the stress out of the experience. *by Matt Cosentino*

It seems that everyone these days can relate to an unpleasant experience with a contractor. Whether it involves a lack of knowledge from the sales staff, miscommunication with the designer or issues with the work crews, it can turn what is supposed to be an enjoyable and exciting time in homeowners' lives into a hectic one.

When Damien Massa and Anthony 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."

"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."

Almost all of the work is done in-house—with very minimal subcontracting—allowing the team to control the quality, productivity and schedule. 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.

There is also an in-house design staff. Massa realizes the great responsibility that they bear, especially with people spending more time than ever in their homes during the pandemic.

"They want their homes to be beautiful," he says. "It's no longer just about function; we want to turn these spaces into an oasis. It's great to be able to take a project, start with a computer rendering and produce a final product that is almost identical. It's exciting for both the designer and the homeowner."

Massa adds that kitchens and bathrooms remain popular, but finished basements and additions have skyrocketed during the past year. "A lot of these spaces are being used as offices, but a lot are used as recreational areas for people to have an escape without leaving the comfort of their own home," he says. "We do basements that have full bars, sound systems, kids' playrooms—you name it, we've done it. I've had requests for spiral slides to be put into a basement from the first floor, so the children can slide down to the basement. People are really being creative with what they want to do in their spaces."

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.

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

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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.

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**



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.

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A Community to Call Home

by Madeleine Maccar

MARK MCKENNA HAS NEARLY THREE DECADES OF REAL ESTATE EXPERIENCE AND HAS NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THE CURRENT MARKET.

As the pandemic drives New York City and North Jersey residents south in droves, area realtors drastically changed their approach to accommodate that influx of newcomers.

"The level of intensity from 7:30 a.m. until 9 at night can be equated to preparing for the Super Bowl—except it's every day," McKenna explains.

It's not just meeting increased demand. Handling buyers who are looking to call a new region home means educating them differently than someone intimately familiar with Burlington, Camden and Gloucester counties.

"This is the first time we're seeing shifts of people from outside our area playing musical chairs in the South Jersey market," McKenna says. "I saw the writing on the wall around April of last year when we started getting calls from 908, 917 and 201 numbers. We changed all of our social media advertising to target the five boroughs of New York and North Jersey."

Pat McKenna Realtors, Eleanor McKenna Broker of Record and its teams operate out of Marlton but have served South Jersey since McKenna's parents Eleanor and the late Pat McKenna founded the agency in the '70s. It's adapted to numerous trends and markets since then, and most recently, McKenna has overseen the growth of his client services team.

"I saw some inefficiencies in our live-answer calls," McKenna explains, adding that the national average of a roughly 44% answer rate "is just not acceptable" when he prefers one closer to 70%. "It makes the customer service so much better in a market where people need information instantaneously."

Part of that meant hiring Karli Cinelli for the new ISA (or inside sales agent) role. She joined a customer outreach team of Transaction Coordinator Lucie Nowicki, Marketing Director Sandy Stern, Digital Content Manager Dalton Lanoza and Director of Client Services Nick Versaggi.

The team also recently introduced an official offer portal directly connected to their website where every agent inputs the same data from standard offer sheets. That data is compiled into a spreadsheet, sorted and shared with clients to compare and prioritize offer terms. Several outside agents have already responded, noting the favorably streamlined process.

McKenna's sales team already closed on 100 units in the first 99 days of 2021. Those numbers are especially promising when you consider the colder half of the year is traditionally "not at all" when properties are moving quickly.

"We usually do between \$65 and \$75 million in sales; last year, we did \$94 million," he says. "It's usually about 230, 235 units a year; by the end of April, we should hit almost 200 units. We're already looking at about \$55 million in four months. I think we're going to hit 400 units this year: Our numbers for January were equal to what we sold in an entire quarter last year. The fourth quarter of 2020 was the best quarter we've ever had in my 29 years, and that's not usually the greatest time for sales."

Houses can have anywhere between three and 30-plus offers these days, with many selling for five digits more than the asking price.

"It can get a little overwhelming, so your

systems and your back office have to be tight," McKenna says.

Part of the agency's ability to adapt comes from knowing their community well. McKenna's local roots go deep, as indicated by his family's most recent spate of local honors. His wife Shannon is a lifelong Marlton resident who was named Lenape Regional High School District's 2021 Teacher of the Year. McKenna himself has also been recognized twice in recent months. Once as the recipient of the Evesham Township Police Department Civilian Service Award, and again as the Volunteer of the Year for Cherokee High School.

Giving back has been the agency's longstanding business philosophy. It's how McKenna turned a disappointing development into an opportunity for the entire Pat McKenna Realtors team to support local causes in Marlton and South Jersey.

After a lighthearted Facebook post inadvertently led to disqualification from the most recent Circle of Excellence nominations, McKenna had the option to pay a fine or be removed from the competition. He opted to put what would have been a \$1,000 fine back into the community, challenging the rest of his office to raise funds for three local organizations, which culminated in December's check-presentation ceremony.

"We ended up donating \$34,000 to the Evesham Township Police Department, St. Joan of Arc church and Operation Yellow Ribbon," McKenna says. "I'd rather give back to a charity that's helping the community than have another plaque on my wall."

After all, McKenna says the real reward isn't recognition: It's all about paying it forward. "That day we presented those checks, those are the kind of days that stand out and are really the best days of my career." H&H

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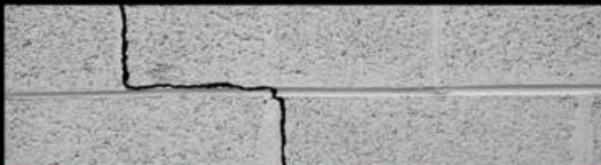
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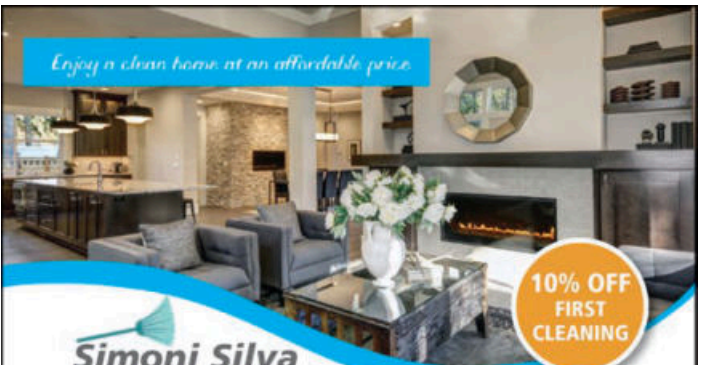
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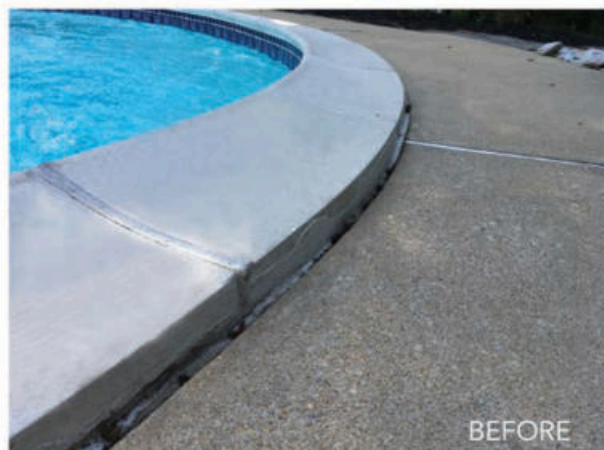
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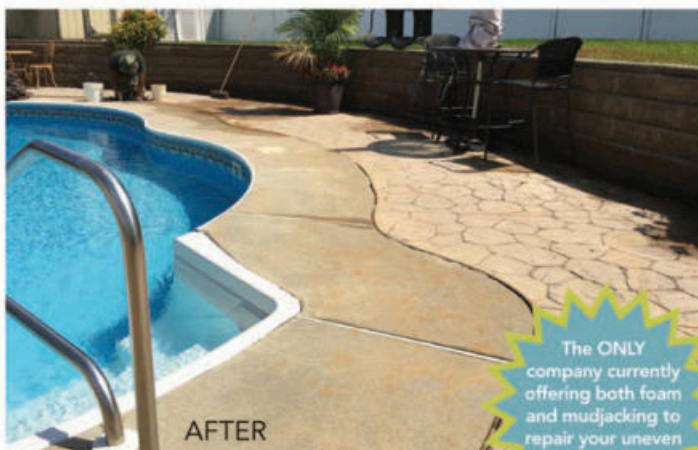


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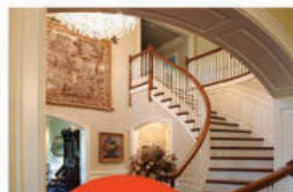
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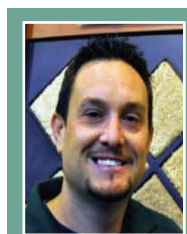
Matteo Family Kitchens & Flooring

AFTER 32 YEARS IN THE KITCHEN AND BATH REMODELING INDUSTRY, EVERETT MATTEO, ALONG WITH HIS WIFE ELAINE AND SONS TOM AND STEVE, WENT INTO BUSINESS FOR THEMSELVES IN 1995.

Matteo Family Kitchens & Flooring is a family-owned business handling every facet of a remodeling project, including design services and supplying the big and small items, from countertops to faucets. However, it's the atmosphere that truly sets Matteo Family Kitchens & Flooring apart.

"When you come in the door, you're not just a customer, you're our friend—we want to explain things to you and give you the best options for your budget," says Steve Matteo, co-owner and store manager.

House & Home spoke with Matteo further about the skyrocketing demand for home improvement projects during the pandemic and the trends he sees sticking around.



Steve Matteo,
co-owner and
store manager

WHAT HAVE YOU SEEN OCCUR OVER THE COURSE OF THIS PANDEMIC IN TERMS OF IN-DEMAND PROJECTS?

People have been using their vacation money to do more work on their house, inside and out. They want to create more livable space. As more people work from home,

they wanted dedicated home office space with storage, upgraded cabinets and countertops. We get excited to work with clients who want to do a new project kitchen, maybe changing out the master bathroom with a big soaking tub and a small stand-up shower to a big walk-in shower—make it something a little bit more useful.

WHAT SHIFTS HAVE YOU NOTICED IN KITCHEN AND BATH DESIGN?

The big shift in kitchens is going from wood cabinets and granite countertops to soft white or gray painted cabinets with a Shaker farmhouse look, and quartz countertops. Even though granite is phenomenal, I believe there is a big push for the manufactured quartz and you see it a lot more on home design shows now. But with that may come a higher cost of material.

Bathrooms, along with kitchens, are in-demand remodeling projects. People are taking out their old master baths, tearing out the tubs and putting in bigger, walk-in tiled showers with frameless doors. The \$20,000 kitchen is now the \$20,000 master bathroom. People like where they live and they want to stay in their home while the kids finish school so they want to add the most value and enjoy it.

HOW HAVE FLOORING DESIGNS CHANGED IN RECENT YEARS?

Just like everything else, technology has improved floors. We've seen more changes in flooring manufacturing and design than anything else in this industry. In the '90s, carpet, which is a petroleum-based product, went up in price along with oil prices. During that time, they improved the product with more stain resistance, building more quality for the added cost. Also, in the late '90s, laminate flooring like Pergo flooring took over the world, but once people realized it wouldn't hold up to water, it shifted to worry-proof flooring. Things went from hard plastics to softer, warmer, water-resistant options.

Hardwood finishes have also changed in the thickness and width of the planks, and gray is a popular color people want. Now they have found new ways to get gray with real hardwood.

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT HOW MATTEO WORKS WITH CLIENTS?

All of our salespeople meet with clients individually in their own home. We don't have a separate team that comes out and measures. We like to come to your home and find out what you are looking for. Maybe we'll notice you have three dogs, which could guide us on the flooring choice, or we'll see you have younger children so you need products that will hold up as the kids get older. Those who are nearing retirement age may want products with convenience, like roll-out trays for pots and pans to save them from bending over. All of these factors play into the design.

Then we'll come up with renderings and email them to the homeowner. This way they can be at home, comfortable with a cup of coffee, looking at the photos. This is all free of charge and is followed by a visit to our large showroom where you can see all of our products—hardwood, tile, backsplashes, cabinets—and color coordinate with the flow of the home. The entire design goes through our kitchen and flooring designers who help customers feel confident that the whole thing will come together perfectly. **H&H**

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David Fisher and wife Lisa stand with circa 1790s Colonial period clock repaired by David Fisher

ANTIQUES AND CLOCKS



daughter Lauren was born and we thought that we would open a clock shop in the area so that we could be closer to home. With my wife's knowledge of antiques and American history, coupled with my clock repairing skills, we moved forward and opened Antiques & Clocks in Cinnaminson. Both of us retired from corporate life and started building our business. We really enjoy what we do. So here we are 33 years later. We watched our

daughter grow up, graduate college and marry her teenage sweetheart. They bought a beautiful home and now we have a beautiful granddaughter and grandson who light up our lives. We always believe family comes first.

What makes your family business unique?

It would be the fact that we work in a field that deals with people's heirlooms and family history. Today, in what is called a throwaway society, our customers defy that stereotype. Our customers care about their clocks because many grew up with them and they carry memories of their families' story. We recently repaired a woman's antique clock that was her great-great grandmother's

wedding present. We have many customers who are extremely happy when they see a clock that was in their family working again.

What are some challenges you've faced working with family members?

My wife and I balance our work and our family lives well. Our daughter and son-in-law work for other companies in the marketing and technology fields. They do help us with technology when we need it. My wife and I try to have lunch at least two times a week to discuss the business and our approach to different scheduling issues that might arise. We always enjoy running the business together.

What are the advantages and/or what do you find rewarding about working with family members?

We are a very close family and have lived through many wonderful milestones together. Our family business enriches our lives both personally and professionally. We both get to do the work we enjoy and that is a huge advantage. My wife handles marketing, scheduling and clock maker historical research as I repair the clocks. It is also rewarding to see the happiness our work brings to others.

What is your favorite thing to do together as a family outside of work?

We love to spend time with our daughter, son-in-law and our beautiful grandchildren. We play tennis together, go to family sporting events together and sometimes even vacation together. **H&H**



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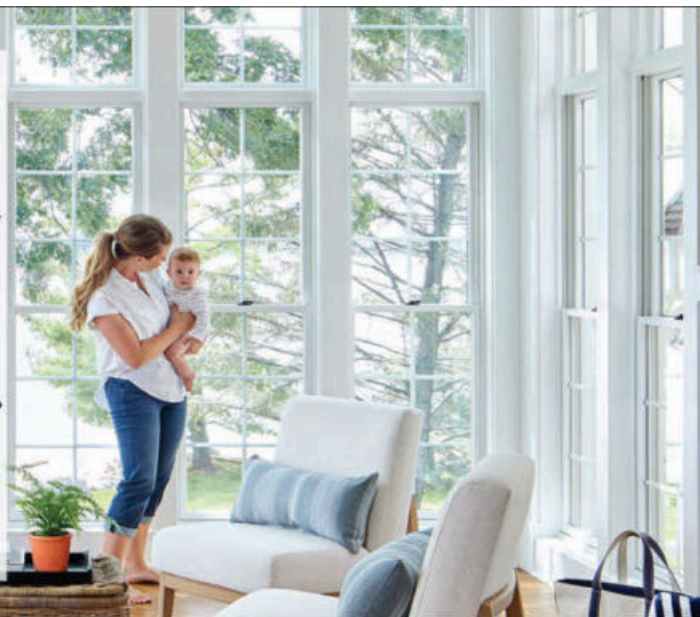
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Gwen Kunkel and brother Paul Randall of New Castle Artisan



NEW CASTLE ARTISAN

Over the years, harsh weather can cause cracks and other damage on a home's concrete surfaces. Homeowners may put off repairs due to cost concerns, but replacing that concrete is not always the answer. Gwen Kunkel, owner of New Castle Artisan, can breathe new life into your existing surfaces—whether it's your driveway, pool deck, patio; practically any concrete surface around your home—with improved products and techniques. *House & Home* spoke with Kunkel about the economic and aesthetic value of concrete resurfacing.

Why would someone want to resurface concrete versus replacement?

The benefit of resurfacing is instead of just fixing a problem like cracking, pitting or damage from mold, you can make a home improvement. Right now if you have concrete that's cracked or un-level, you can repair or replace it with new concrete, but you'll just have new concrete. It doesn't increase the curb appeal of your home. It doesn't increase the value of your home. With resurfacing, we add design and we carve the cracks into the existing pattern after we repair

them, so you've got something that looks like you spent money to do a home improvement and not just a home repair. That makes it more valuable financially and aesthetically.

Why do you use polymer cements?

Our polymer cements are the best alternative for exterior projects because they resist erosion. Applied properly, they do not peel, flake or delaminate. They are absorbed into the existing concrete, grow spines that expand creating a new cement surface that is incredibly durable as well as stain and chemical resistant.

How much experience do you have?

We've been doing projects for 29 years in the South Jersey area.

How long does your work last?

Resurfacing has been around since the 1960s. It is not new technology but I have personally had jobs down for over 25 years in South Jersey. We offer a two-year warranty that can be extended. If the bond is done properly, it will last a lifetime with some routine resealing maintenance.

You also resurface pool decks. How cost effective is that?

The cost to rip out and replace a pool deck is usually considerably more than resurfacing. Being that most pools are located in the backyard, just the concrete can cost up to 35 percent more because they have to wheelbarrow it in, which is labor intensive.

Will it ruin my landscaping or grass?

No. As a matter of fact, aside from it being beautiful, you wouldn't even know we were there. You don't have to take down any fences. We don't use any heavy equipment. Everything we bring is carried in and carried out, so your landscaping looks exactly the same.

Can you tell me about your flooring solutions for garages, basements and shower rooms?

Polymer cements are good interior options because they're highly durable and water resistant, which is great for basements and garages. Our products are applied by hand for a unique artistic touch that can be customized however you would like. We offer various styles from simple solid color flooring to textured finishes comparable to brick or natural stone.

What about your fireplace services and accent walls?

In the winter when we cannot be outside resurfacing exteriors, we do like to take on fireplace and accent wall projects. In as little as one day, we can transform an old brick fireplace to look like a beautiful stone custom centerpiece for your home. The same with our accent walls that can be designed to match existing decor or we can create a new style completely. **H&H**



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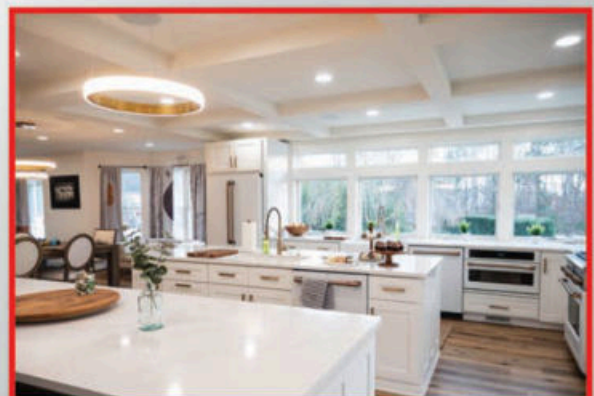
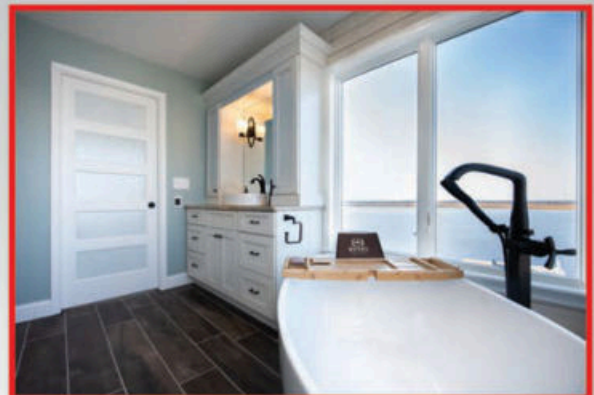
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