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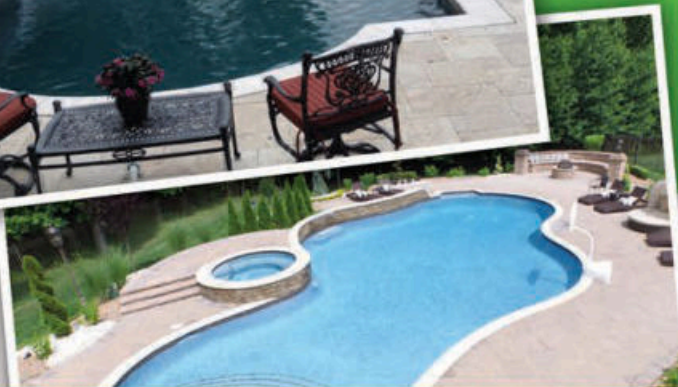
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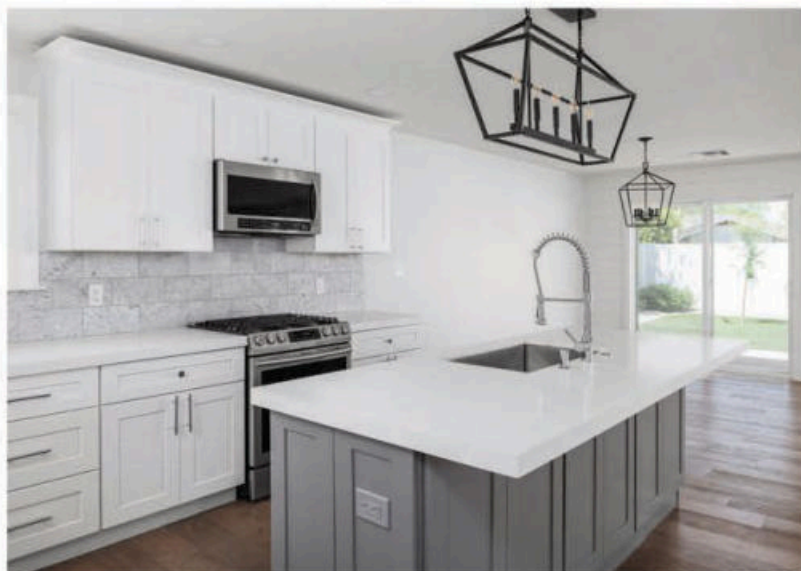


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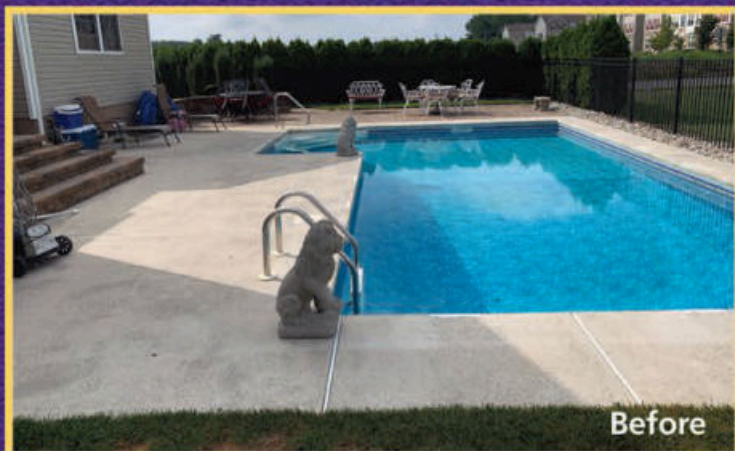
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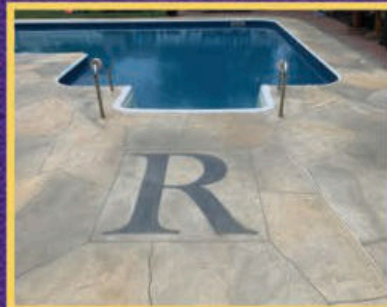
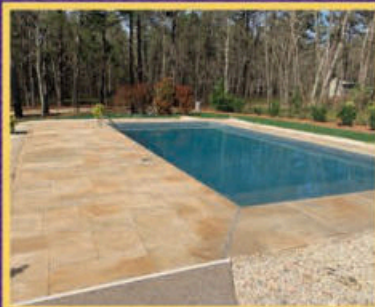
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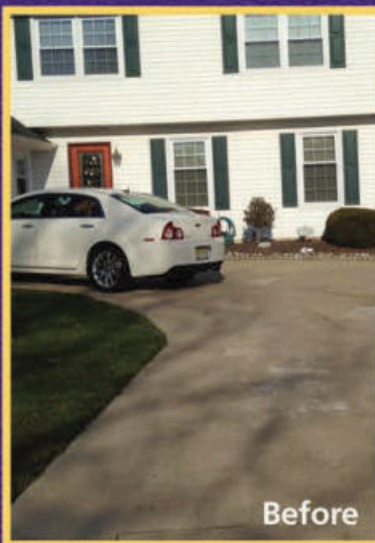


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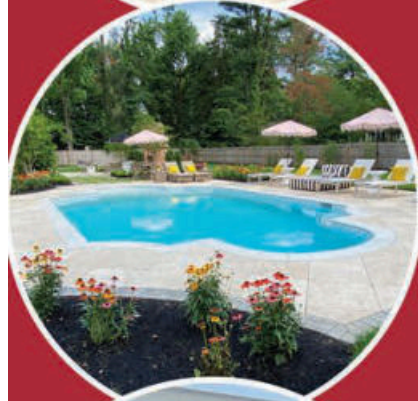
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“storm chasers.” They follow severe weather from area to area, knowing that there will be a lot of work.

They typically have no community roots and therefore no knowledge of local building codes. Their “rush job” often has shoddy work and since they typically leave the area in chase of the next storm, they can’t be reached when there are problems.

How can you spot a storm chaser?

Kelly says it’s critical to be wary of contractors who may not have a physical office—again, an indicator that they may be a fly-by-night company. They’ll do the work (poorly) and then disappear,

“At Emmons, you are not only investing in a new roof, new siding or new windows—you’re investing in peace of mind.”

—Stephanee Kelly,
co-owner, Emmons Roofing & Siding

leaving you with problems.

“We are a local small business in Williamstown with real people answering the phones—not an answering service,” Matthew Kelly says. “We don’t work out of a house and we do not have a ‘virtual office.’ Be wary of contractors that will not provide you with a physical address but instead only have a P.O. box or suite number and only use an answering service.”

Some of the worst storm chasers don’t even carry the proper insurance and are therefore putting you at risk.

“We are fully insured and also carry liability insurance, which is required for roofing operations,” Matthew Kelly says. “But many contractors carry cheaper insurance that does not include liability insurance, leaving you, the homeowner, liable if a worker is injured while working on your roof. Make sure the insurance certificate sent to you by your contractor’s insurance agency specifically includes liability insurance.”

CHOOSING WISELY

At the end of the day, your choice in roofing, siding and window contractors 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,” says Stephanee Kelly. “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**

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 workmanship 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 Stephanee 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.”

PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST STORM CHASERS

Unfortunately, when it comes to contractors for roofing, siding and windows, there are a lot of fly-by-night companies out there and it’s important for homeowners to protect themselves. In the business, many of these companies are called

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BACKYARD BLISS

BY MATT COSENTINO

OUTDOOR KITCHENS

continue to evolve into fully functional spaces that rival what's inside.

Along with family vacations, trips to the beach and baseball games, the backyard barbecue is right near the top of the list when it comes to favorite summertime activities. This longstanding tradition has only been enhanced over the past decade with the emerging popularity of outdoor kitchens, which have provided a central loca-

tion for homeowners to mingle with their guests while flipping burgers and hot dogs.

Lately, however, outdoor kitchens have included much more than just a simple grilling station and have evolved into a functional space similar to what's in the home, featuring refrigerators, sinks, prep and storage space, and trash cans. Many times they

become even more elaborate and incorporate all the bells and whistles, from pizza ovens and griddles to rotisseries.

"COVID has definitely driven the demand for outdoor kitchens even further than what it was before," says Jordan Shenk of EWBK, which specializes in outdoor living projects. "People wanted outdoor kitchens

prior to COVID but now it's a little bit different. They want beyond just a standard grill station in the backyard. They basically want an extension of their home, so they want their outdoor kitchens filled with many appliances to make it feel like it's a room itself."

Not only are homeowners going bigger with their outdoor kitchens, but there's been a significant uptick in the number of projects as well. Several local experts took time out of their busy schedules to share their insight into the trends they're seeing and how a professional can help design and build an outdoor kitchen that can become a showstopper.

Imagine the possibilities

When homeowners decide to move forward with an outdoor kitchen project, the fun part is making a wish list of all the amenities they would like to include, of course with their budget in mind.

"I get excited when we start talking about outdoor kitchens because the possibilities are only as limited as your desire," says Bill Lecorchick Jr. of Legends Home Improvements. "When COVID hit, everybody started spending way more time at home and in their backyards, and now they're looking to cook all summer. It's not just burgers and dogs anymore—people want smokers and we can fit the Big Green Egg into their outdoor kitchen. We're also putting deep fryers in, pizza ovens, griddles, and you can even do hibachi outside.

"Other components include the trash can, the fridge, warming drawers and cooling drawers. Anything you want to put in there, we can do it."

Joe Oakes of First State Building & Design (FSBD) begins the process by finding out as much as possible about the customer's lifestyle so he can design an outdoor kitchen



that best suits their needs.

"We just ask them how they're going to use the space," he says. "What do you like to do: Do you do corn broils? Do you entertain and grill a lot? Do you need to be able to do food prep out here? We really try to understand how they're going to use the space and then direct them to the proper components. We start off by providing pricing for what it's going to cost to get water lines out there and drain lines out there. We have to make sure it's within what they want to invest in their outdoor kitchen."

Even with outdoor kitchens evolving, the grill remains the centerpiece, and Lecorchick likes to install built-in grills with 18-inch wings on either side and a natural gas line running

to it, eliminating the need for a propane tank. Shenk adds that customers are seeking top-of-the-line units that are powerfully built and able to cook large meals in a short amount of time.

"We use high-end products because that's what people are looking for," she says. "They're not looking for a cookie-cutter grill from a big chain store. Those are nice but they're not going to last like these stainless steel pieces. Even if [the space is] covered, your outdoor kitchen does face the elements, the colder temperatures. So you definitely want products that are going to hold up to that."

Beyond the grills, people are adding alternative cooking methods to take their menu—and party—to the next level.

"We may only do about five or six of them per year but pizza ovens are starting to become a little more popular on the outdoor kitchens," Oakes says. "You can do a lot of things with it. A majority of the time it's used for pizza but it can be very versatile.

"It's the same thing with griddles and power burners that you can put out there: They're not just geared toward one type of food—you can do corn broils, shrimp boils. We have smokers that are going into outdoor kitchens as well with the Big Green Eggs and the Kamado grills. We're building them into the countertop or dropping them down onto their own separate platform."

While the outdoor kitchens of the past were usually linear setups, several of the professionals who spoke to *House & Home* say that L-shaped designs are now used a majority



BACKYARD BLISS

of the time. Incorporating a bar area near the kitchen and then a separate, outdoor “living room” with comfortable seating and a television completes the space.

“When we do a grilling area, we want to design the space so people can sit around and you can be with your guests and not off by yourself,” says Bill Wilson of Amazing Decks. “We want to integrate the space. If you have people over, you’re going to be grilling—that’s just the way it is. But we don’t want you to be separate from your guests.”

“When we do outdoor kitchens, I’m always looking for an area where they can make their drinks,” Lecorchick adds. “We’ll do a kitchen area that is L-shaped and wrap it around and have it raised to bar height, and on that side we’ll throw the refrigerator and wine cooler, along with shelves and drawers. You want to have it set up so you’re not carrying everything in and out of the house.”

Not just for summer

As outdoor kitchens get bigger and bigger, naturally the price tag goes up as well. So it makes sense to add some features that will allow it to be a usable space beyond just June, July and August.

“They are almost always in demand with some type of roof structure, whether that’s a roof attached to the home or a custom pavilion, which is another popular choice,” Shenk says. “The roof structures are great with outdoor kitchens for more reasons than one. ... It draws your eye when you have a roof structure over it and it makes it more of its own

room. It also helps with those colder months and you can still use your outdoor kitchen if it’s raining.

“A lot of our customers are now requesting to have fireplaces with their outdoor kitchen, and sometimes that is a gas fireplace insert but other times it is a wood-burning fireplace with hearth included and beautiful custom mason pieces that make the fireplace a showstopper in itself. Being under a structure and including some kind of warmth from a fireplace, whether it’s gas or wood-burning, definitely helps extend the use of your outdoor kitchen to almost the whole year.”

FSBD specializes in custom stone and masonry features like fireplaces or fire pits and encourages clients to consider the benefits.

“Having that true fire feature is something you want to think about and incorporate, whether it be a natural wood-burning fireplace or fire pit, or one that has gas lines run to it and requires less maintenance with no smoke, no wood cleanup, and you don’t have to store firewood. It gives you that ambiance flame that puts out a little heat as well for when your guests come over,” Oakes says. He adds that it’s roughly 50-50 whether homeowners prefer a wood-burning or gas fire feature. “I would say it’s a happy medium. Some people like that wood-burning smell, that

atmosphere, but there are a lot of clients who like to flip a switch and have their fireplace come on.”

Lecorchick cautions that with a roof structure, it’s a must to install an outdoor fan over the grill to prevent soot buildup. He is also a big proponent of adding a heating element so the outdoor kitchen can be used throughout the fall.

“Fireplaces and fire pits are great, but fireplaces do take up a lot of space,” he says. “Infrared heaters are fantastic. They make it very comfortable and you won’t be feeling anything out there.”

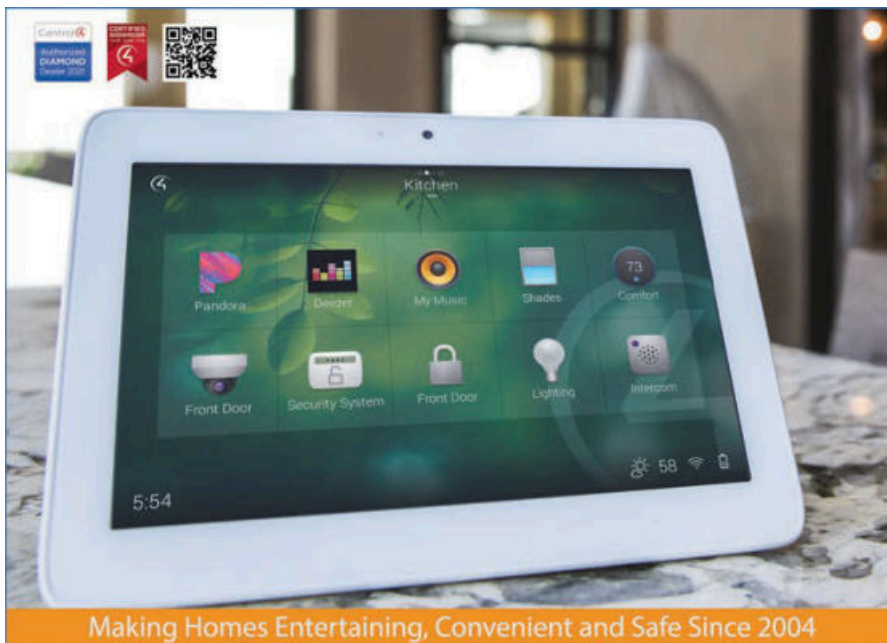
Choosing the right materials

When selecting the materials for an outdoor kitchen, aesthetics and durability both must enter into the equation. Michael Chadwick of Riverside Supply Company says his team works with contractors, masons and even homeowners themselves to come up with the best materials, from stone to veneer, brick and more.

“We have a lot of people who, instead of using the paver material for the outdoor kitchens or the outdoor fireplaces, are going with either the thin veneer stone—manufactured or natural—or they’re going with the thin brick if they want to add a brick motif to their outdoor area,” he says. “Sometimes using the thin brick or the thin veneer stone for the outdoor kitchen, the pizza oven or the fireplace helps it stand out a little more.”

Chadwick stresses that supply chain issues have hit the industry hard. Material availability has improved, but the high price to deliver materials from other parts of the country is adding significantly to the overall cost of projects.





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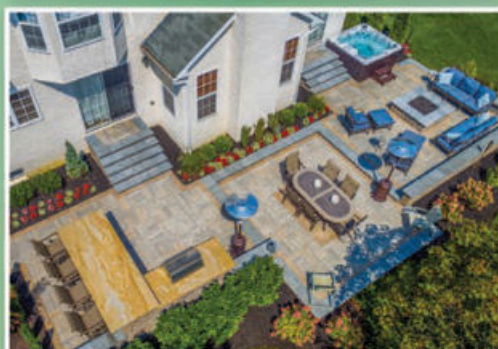
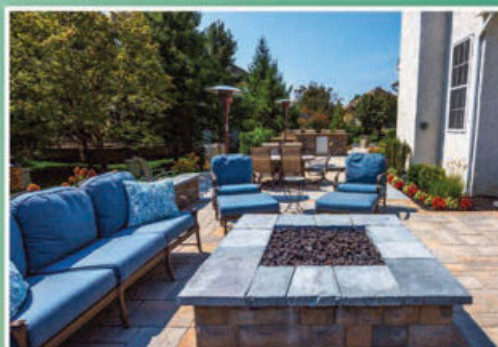
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"We try to tell people to plan ahead as much as possible, and we keep a lot of material in stock," he says. "That's one good thing—we have a pretty large area to keep a lot of stock material, especially the thin brick. The thin brick has really exploded over the last five or six years, so we stock a large amount of that."

As far as countertops for the outdoor kitchen or bar area, some of the same materials used inside are recommended, but others are not suitable for dealing with the elements.

"I like granite the best," Lecorchick says. "We've also done tops in limestone, bluestone and tile, but I like that the granite is a solid piece, it's a stone so it's porous, and it's easy to clean—you just wipe it down and away you go. With tile, we do bigger tiles and smaller grout lines so there's less of it, and that cleans up real easily too. With bluestone and limestone, if you put a wet glass on top of the stone you get a ring. It emulsifies and fades out, but it's just another thing you don't want to deal with."

"We have utilized custom flagstone for countertops and we are really getting into some cool designs using concrete countertops," Oakes adds. "You can get different colors and different edges for the concrete, from a modern finish to a rustic finish."

Standing out from the crowd

When all is said and done with the outdoor kitchen, the goal is to create a space that not only fulfills the homeowners' needs but also reflects their personalities.

"When you add in those custom requests, that's when your piece becomes super personalized, because it's one of a kind," Shenk says. "It's your project that you're creating. ... That's what we aim to do, to make that personal touch. We

don't want our designs to look cookie-cutter. We want it to stand out and I think that's why our clients pick us, because they're part of the vision."

Shenk, a history buff, notes that "summer kitchens" were used in the late 1700s and early 1800s as a separate cooking space away from the main home, so that heat from the fire didn't overpower the living area. It is interesting to see outdoor kitchens become mainstays in modern times, and she doesn't see the trend stopping anytime soon.

"You almost see a return on investment between 100% and 200% with outdoor kitchens," she says. "They definitely increase the value of your home, and they increase the demand of people wanting it when you sell it. It's high on people's lists—not just the outdoor kitchen but the outdoor space. People want entertainment space outside." **H&H**



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ask the expert
by Brittany Ann Morrissey

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.

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Gwen Kunkel and brother Paul Randall of New Castle Artisan

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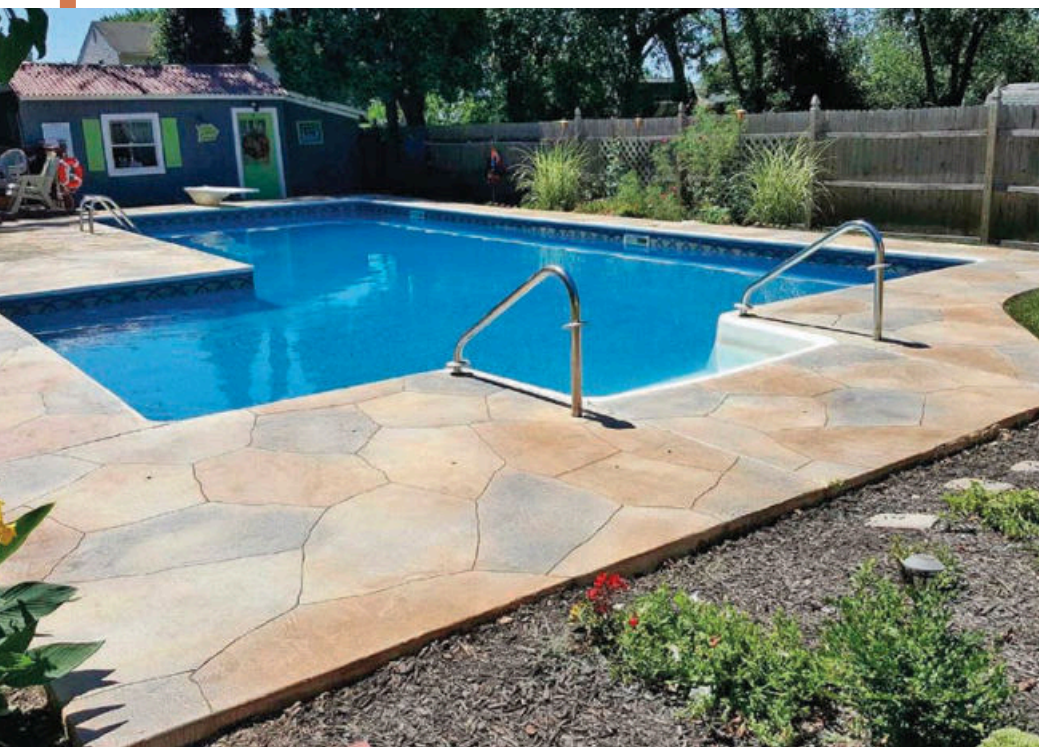
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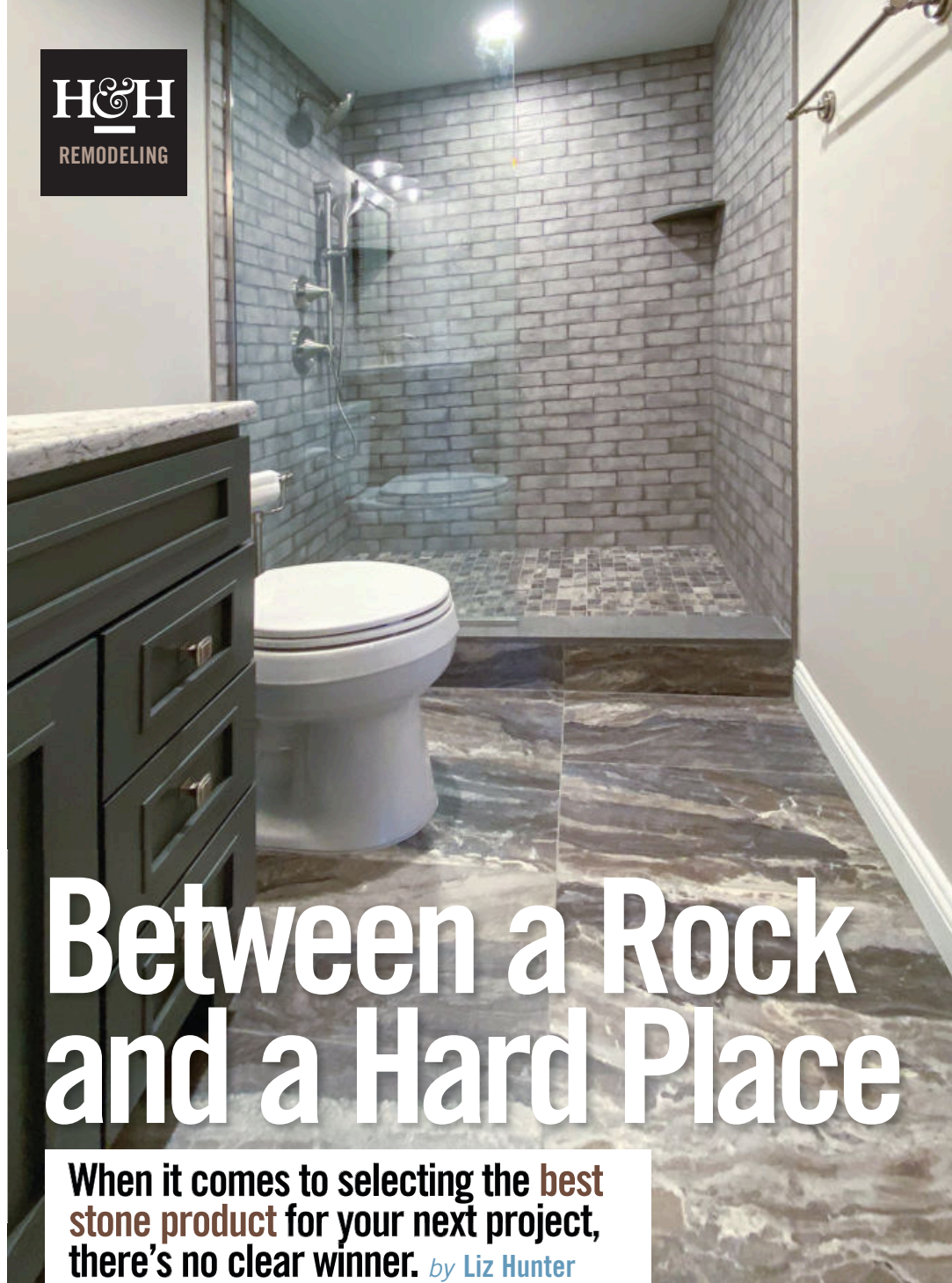
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Between a Rock and a Hard Place

When it comes to selecting the best stone product for your next project, there's no clear winner. *by Liz Hunter*

FOR THE LONGEST TIME, granite seemed to have a complete stranglehold on the stone market. The first request from homeowners remodeling their kitchen was more often than not “granite countertops.” Things have changed though, and while granite still has its place, there are other contenders tossing their name in the ring.

NATURAL STONE VS. QUARTZ

One of the first things to address

is the difference between granite and quartz. Granite is a natural stone, mined in quarries, many of which are right here in the U.S. The fact that this product—and others such as marble, limestone and quartzite—comes from nature means that its colors and patterns are completely random. No two slabs are identical. Natural stone has been favored in kitchen design for its durability and resistance to the temperature extremes a countertop might undergo.

Quartz is stone mixed with resins, classifying it as a man-made product. Some people prefer it because of its uniformity. It's also low maintenance and non-porous—all features that appeal to the average person.

But when speaking with home improvement design professionals, their opinions vary.

“Keep away from granite,” advises Vasos Posidonas, owner of VT Home Improvements. “We’re replacing it in nearly every kitchen we do. Quartz is the way

to go. It’s more durable and not affected by temperatures.”

“Regular aggregate granite is out; people want quartz,” says Keith Bernhardt Jr., owner of TriCity Kitchens. “What’s popular now is the look of a veined marble pattern. You wouldn’t want to have a porous marble counter, so the quartz gives you the opportunity to have that look without the maintenance.”

“I don’t think granite has run its course,” says Albert Kzelian, owner of Imperial Marble & Granite. “You don’t have to worry about scratching or staining, and people like the beauty of a natural product.”

Kyle Eisele, head of business development at Coast Tile & Marble Supply, believes natural stone gets a bad rap. “People get turned off by natural stone when they hear they need to maintain it,” he says. “Yes, it’s a porous material and over time the sealer fades. But what it takes to reseal it is very easy, and should not be the one reason not to use it. It’s a beautiful material and the bit of maintenance it does require is worth it for its beauty.”

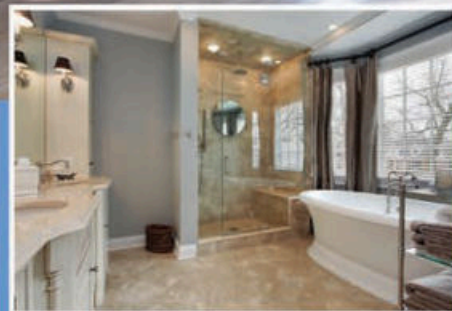
Kzelian puts it into further perspective. As with most things, there is a generational gap in taste preferences. “We’ve seen a lot of the younger generation, they like that modern look—that’s customers anywhere between the ages of 25 to 40. They love the quartz. But the clients 40 and older, they still like marble and granite. They like the natural colors.”

CONSIDERING THE INDIVIDUAL

Although these professionals have their own opinions, it’s the customers’ style, preference and budget that ultimately determines the stone. And there are plenty of stones in the sea—so to speak.

“You need to understand what a client’s needs are or what they’re looking for. For instance, if a client likes to cook at their home a lot, we don’t really recommend quartz. If you’re doing

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Between a Rock and a Hard Place



a lot of cooking and you're going to be putting a lot of hot pots on your counters, the quartz is not durable enough because it has resin. [Wear and tear] kind of stains the resin itself," Kzelian explains. "For them, I'd suggest marble or granite. If a homeowner doesn't want to do marble or granite, then we'd go into what is called quartzite, and quartzite is actually a natural product, which is very strong and very durable—but just, unfortunately, very expensive."



In Coast Tile's case, its location near the Shore means they see two types of customers on the opposite ends of the spectrum. "We get customers who want something subtle in their primary home because they look at it every day, but we also work on projects in second homes, something they'll use on weekends and in the summer. They don't want maintenance or stains, and they want fun colors and textures," Eisele says.

This gives the designers at Coast Tile a chance to play with materials and textures. "Porcelain is becoming more popular in countertops. They are arguably the most durable," he continues. "When you think about a Shore outdoor kitchen and the elements, porcelain holds up, and it's not going to stain. Cement is also an option if the customer wants something truly unique. You can add your own colors, almost like epoxy, and practically create your own artwork. It's not for everybody, but it's exciting and can create a conversation piece wherever you use it in the home."

The finish of a stone can also change the look. Dave Cerami, CKBR, president of HomeTech Renovations, says he was one of the first in the industry to take the shine off of natural stone, instead brushing it with a wire brush to create texture. "It adds a beautiful look, rather than the shiny,

reflecting surface, and is just a little more special," he says.

In Kzelian's experience, the shiny look still goes into the majority of projects. "About 10 to 15% like to do a matte finish or leather finish," he says. "Polished is still what everybody's asking for."

TILE AND TRENDS

Tile is another product that has evolved with some high-end options that are applicable throughout a home. Cerami says tile could be ceramic, porcelain, stone; and where it's going: foyer, family room, kitchen or bath, determines what to use.

"There are logical deductions on where to use tile. If you're remodeling over a cement slab foundation or floor, tile would be a great choice because you can bind it to the cement sub-base. This is preferable vs. installing a floating wood floor over the concrete," he says. "But I would also recommend a radiant heating system underneath the tile to warm the floor."

He says this would be perfect for a primary bathroom located over a garage or a sun porch that is being converted into a year-round room.

Most of our experts agree: the bigger the tile, the better. "The larger the tile, the more modern the look, compared to the smaller tiles with the traditional bullnose finish. There's not much of those being requested now. It makes the finished project look dated," says Posidonas.

"People want bigger pieces," Eisele states. "In porcelain, it's either 24 by 48 inches or 12 by 24 inches. The bigger piece allows the movement in the stone to really come out. If you chop it into tiny pieces, it looks busier and clashes."

Porcelain tile can also have a wood-look, which is extremely popular now. "The industry has come pretty far in how authentic the wood grains and patterns look on the porcelain tile. It's like having hardwood without the maintenance," Cerami adds. "Even in that area, there are var-

ious aesthetics, such as farmhouse or contemporary and everything in between. It takes an expert to know the difference in the styles."

One element that is immediately associated with tile is grout. The large-format tiles allow for fewer grout lines.

Bernhardt goes back to quartz. "It can be used in bathrooms, even on shower walls, as opposed to tile and offers no grout, no cleaning and it does better with moisture," he says. "Any time you have grout, over time it can discolor or if it comes out, water can get behind it, which you don't want to happen."

Cerami says there are some new performance-based grouts that have less propensity for staining. "Grout is part of having tile, so it's important to use a design-build professional who knows about the performance-based grouts without sand that will repel the typical stains people associate with grout," he advises. **H&H**



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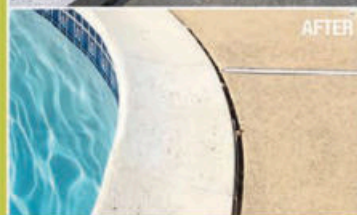
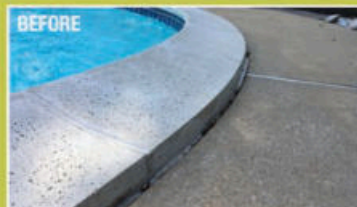
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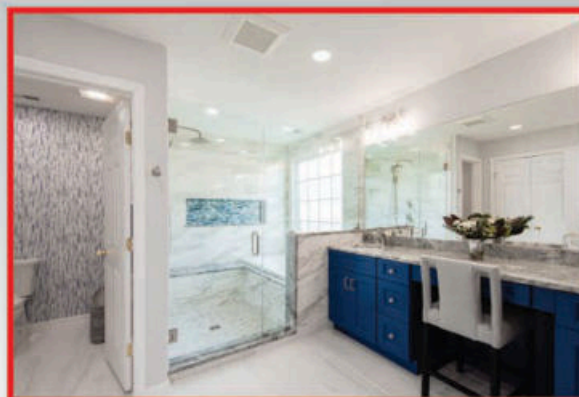
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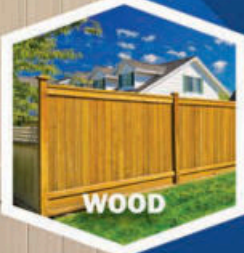


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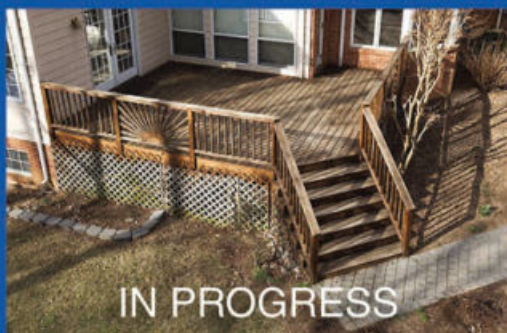
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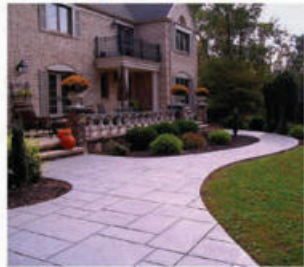
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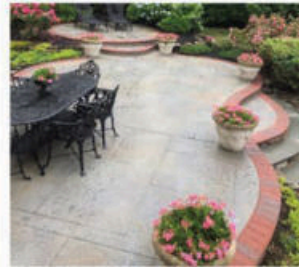
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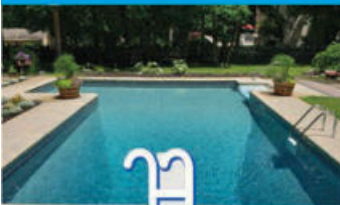
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by Peter Proko

New flooring, storage solutions and other enhancements are opening up the garage to new possibilities.

Reimagining the Garage

During the course of the pandemic,

as countless folks found themselves enjoying their living quarters more than ever before, the interest in home improvement projects skyrocketed. Fresh coats of paint were added to the walls to breathe new life into drab and discarded rooms. Basements were finished and outfitted with desired amenities. And of course, the most popular home renovation projects—kitchen and bathroom remodels—took center stage as homeowners looked at updating with the latest styles and trends. Even outdoor living spaces were reimagined with the addition of outdoor kitchens, decks, new hardscaping and landscaping,

pools and much more.

In the midst of this flurry of activity, one room that was once considered an afterthought is garnering plenty of attention these days: the garage. Often cluttered, disorganized and neglected, the garage space has become the final frontier for those looking to truly transform their home and they are doing so by adding cabinetry for better organization, new flooring, enhanced lighting and other features. As a result, the garage has become much more than just a place to store lawn equipment, dump your kid's sports stuff or simply park the car.

Paul Greskovich, owner of Garage Craft Interiors, says he's definitely seen a large uptick of

folks wanting to better organize and use their garage space of late. "People were realizing that they have this beautiful home on the inside, but they have to walk through a debris field to get there," he says. "And people always want to declutter; they suddenly realize when they look at things that they have stuff in the garage that they haven't touched for eight or 10 years and it make sense to do something."

And it's no wonder why these projects are gaining in popularity. With more than half of homeowners using the garage as their main entryway into the house, it's the first thing homeowners see when they arrive home and the last thing they see before they

leave. What's more, a study by the United States Department of Energy showed that 25% of people with two-car garages don't park in them at all, largely due to clutter.

Joe Paul acknowledges there's been a noticeable spike in homeowners interested in garage makeovers since the pandemic. His company, Apex Concrete Coating Solutions, installs garage flooring systems, specializing in polyurea and polyaspartic coatings.

"People want to open their garage after coming home from a day of work and see organization, they want it to be clean. It's the room they come in and out of the most and they track a lot of dirt inside the house from the



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Reimagining the Garage



garage. In my case, they want a floor that's easier to keep clean," says Paul.

There are lots of color combinations that customers can choose from, but many look to have it blend with the rest of the home. "Most people gravitate toward colors in the house. If they have a lot of gray, for instance, they gravitate toward those base colors," Paul says.

Yasu Yamauchi, owner of Yasu's Flooring, has similarly found a lot of his clients have decided to install epoxy flooring out of practicality for the increased time they spend in their garages.

"Most people that choose this route do so because they are working in the garage a lot and they want something that is very easy to clean and functional. These floors don't absorb a lot of humidity and they're waterproof and chemical resistant," he says.

Floorguard's Reid Murray further illustrates epoxy flooring's effectiveness by touting its durability and industrial strength. "Ground water naturally evaporates through the soil and concrete slabs, so the epoxy coating is like a membrane on the floor and reduces the humidity you may experience in the garage."

Transylvania Concrete Coatings also offers a range of flooring

coating options, including epoxy, metallic, chip and polyurea. While they all have their appeal, their Chip Evolution floor has become the most popular.

"The one that we recommend 99% of the time is the Chip Evolution floor because of its anti-skid, chip-resistant and chemical-resistant properties," says Bogdan Pop, principal.

In addition to the flooring, Floorguard's Murray also specializes in garage organization and has seen a lot of customers adding new lighting and painting the walls to create a new spot for family and friends to gather.

"[The garage] can be a hangout space. We did a project for people that wanted to host football games during the pandemic," says Murray.

Pop has also noticed that folks are looking for new ways to utilize their garage space. "Homeowners want to increase the square footage of their home, whether it's adding a gym, creating a man cave, etc. We have seen a huge growth in this area."

Lenny Kelman, owner of Dream Garage Remodeling Co., says around 80% of his customers are all asking about new flooring, but once that's installed the other biggest trend he's seen has been homeowners' desire to better organize.

"People are trying to enclose everything and put it behind cabinet doors so everything looks clean," says Kelman.

While a clean, streamlined look certainly is easy on the eyes, Kelman stresses the importance of not only creating a garage that is aesthetically pleasing, but also functional for their specific needs.

"Whenever I go out to people's homes, based on what they need, I design something that is for them specifically. Everyone is different and there is no one-size-fits-all approach," says Kelman.

Greskovich knows that firsthand, as he's done everything from install pull-down staircases in the ceiling, add flatscreen TVs and refrigerators, or change out the previous lighting for surface-mount LEDs.

"Your quality of life improves dramatically after you make over your garage," says Greskovich. "I take it from disorganized chaos and I make it a beautiful room. And people become much more reluctant to mess it up once they get it nice. They become more selective on what they decide to keep."

And for those looking to possibly cash-in on the red-hot real estate market, a refinished garage can boost curb appeal and help you fetch top dollar.

"If there are two homes for sale and one has a garage all made up—the floor is done, there's cabinets, shelving—and in the other home nothing has been done; most likely the home with the finished garage will sell first," offers Kelman.

Greskovich agrees: "If you go to sell your home and everything on the inside is nice, the person looking at your house has already looked at several other homes that are nice on the inside. But the one they'll remember is the one with the finished garage. It separates you from the crowd." **H&H**



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The family-owned **Orbit Energy & Power** aims to deliver a suite of environmentally friendly products and services that promote clean energy, better living and stronger communities, one project at a time.

By **Madeleine Maccar**

Orbit Energy & Power is a whole-home solutions company providing a list of home improvement and efficiency services with a vision for a cleaner future extending well beyond solar energy.

It's a family-owned company that fosters a sense of familial warmth among its staff. It's a team of environmental stewards advocating for green energy and smarter homes. It helps homeowners increase their property value, achieve a healthier lifestyle, minimize their carbon footprint and enjoy the monetary savings of a more efficient property.

"We do offer a list of other services beyond solar: water treatment, landscaping, roofing—and most importantly, battery storage, like EV [electric vehicle] charging," says Vice President of Marketing Jaime Laviena. "From a home-solutions perspective, we're effectively empowered to build a smart home for a customer, get that customer off the grid and make them self-sustaining."

And it's all built on a four-cornered foundation of integrity, passion, accountability and commitment that embodies the company's tagline: "Your Whole-Home Solutions Provider for Life!"

"That all starts with building a team of industry experts that are both extremely knowledgeable and passionate about our service offerings—90% of the people who work for Orbit do so because they believe in the cause, they believe in saving the planet and rectifying what's been done to it over the last few decades," Laviena notes, adding how that organic, self-motivated drive helps the Orbit team stay focused on the bigger picture to make the most impactful changes.

"The investment we make in our team scales out to our customers," he continues. "It starts at home. When you invest in a team that

believes in a service or a product offering, you have people that are educating more than they're selling. We have crew members and operational team members that are educating while they're executing; They're showing people what they're doing, why they're doing it, how it's going to impact the local community."

Orbit's staff shares their enthusiasm for the company's collective cause not only with clients but also the greater community. Laviena explains how the Community Day currently being planned for Mantua Township, New Jersey—home of Orbit's headquarters—is a day of family-friendly fun with food, games and togetherness with "no obligation, no return, it's just us giving back," and something Orbit does for every one of its operational territories.

Beyond its Community Day festivities, Orbit has a suite of philanthropic efforts it both champions and supports. In addition to donating 2% of its annual sales to the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Orbit also sponsors youth athletic teams and school theater programs, partners with other entities to maximize their charitable impact and advises others organizations on ways to successfully spearhead their own fundraisers.

It is, after all, about making the biggest impact possible. Whether it's by giving back to the community, planting native saplings to replace any trees removed for solar-panel obstruction through donations to the National Forest Fund, or helping one homeowner at a

time lead a healthier life with water treatments by "removing all those harsh chemicals that are slowly killing us every day" from their tap water, Orbit walks the walk when it comes to thinking globally by acting locally.

"Every job that we install lends to a bucket of investments that goes back to a community," Laviena says. "A piece of every project goes back into its community base."

Replacing home energy systems with solar panels remains the company's bread and butter, and making that type of clean, green energy available to anyone who wants to make the switch is monumentally important to Orbit.

"The most important thing for people to know when considering going solar with Orbit is affordability," says Laviena. "The biggest concern about converting to solar is that it's not affordable, but we make it as affordable and easy for a customer. Investing in solar empowers you to have ownership of your energy and lower your utility bill—rather than paying a large and often unpredictable monthly electricity bill. You also get to benefit from all of the incentives made available to homeowners, whether it be the 26% federal tax credit for every new solar customer or varying state-based incentives and promotions."

Just like Orbit can offer whole-home solutions for every property, Laviena emphasizes that it similarly finds a way to work with every potential customer in any of the states it serves.

"We work with clients from all walks of life," he says. "There's not an instance where we turn a customer away. If there's an issue or a reason why the client might be held up, we always find a solution. And that's a promise: There's always a way to push the client forward."

And Laviena, like his Orbit family, is thrilled to be part of a team that's helping their neighbors achieve energy independence while lowering carbon emissions in today's pursuit of a cleaner future and fostering community unity along the way. **H&H**



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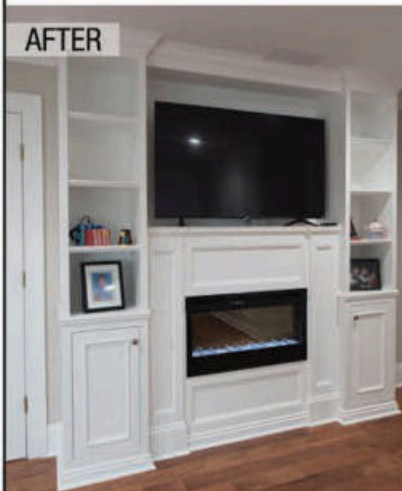
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