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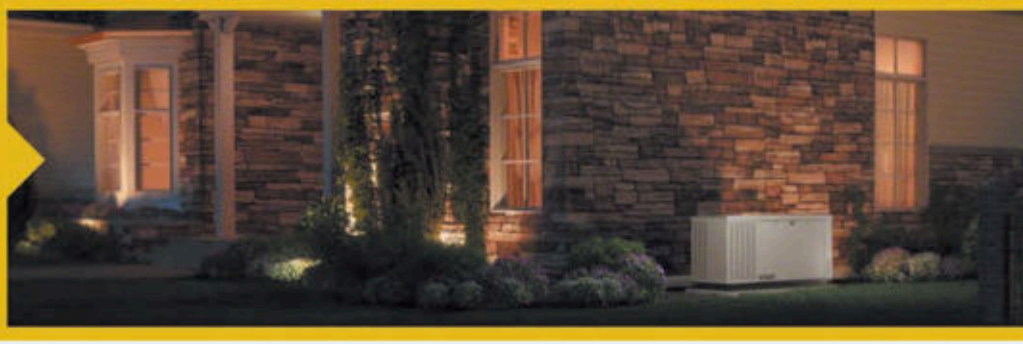
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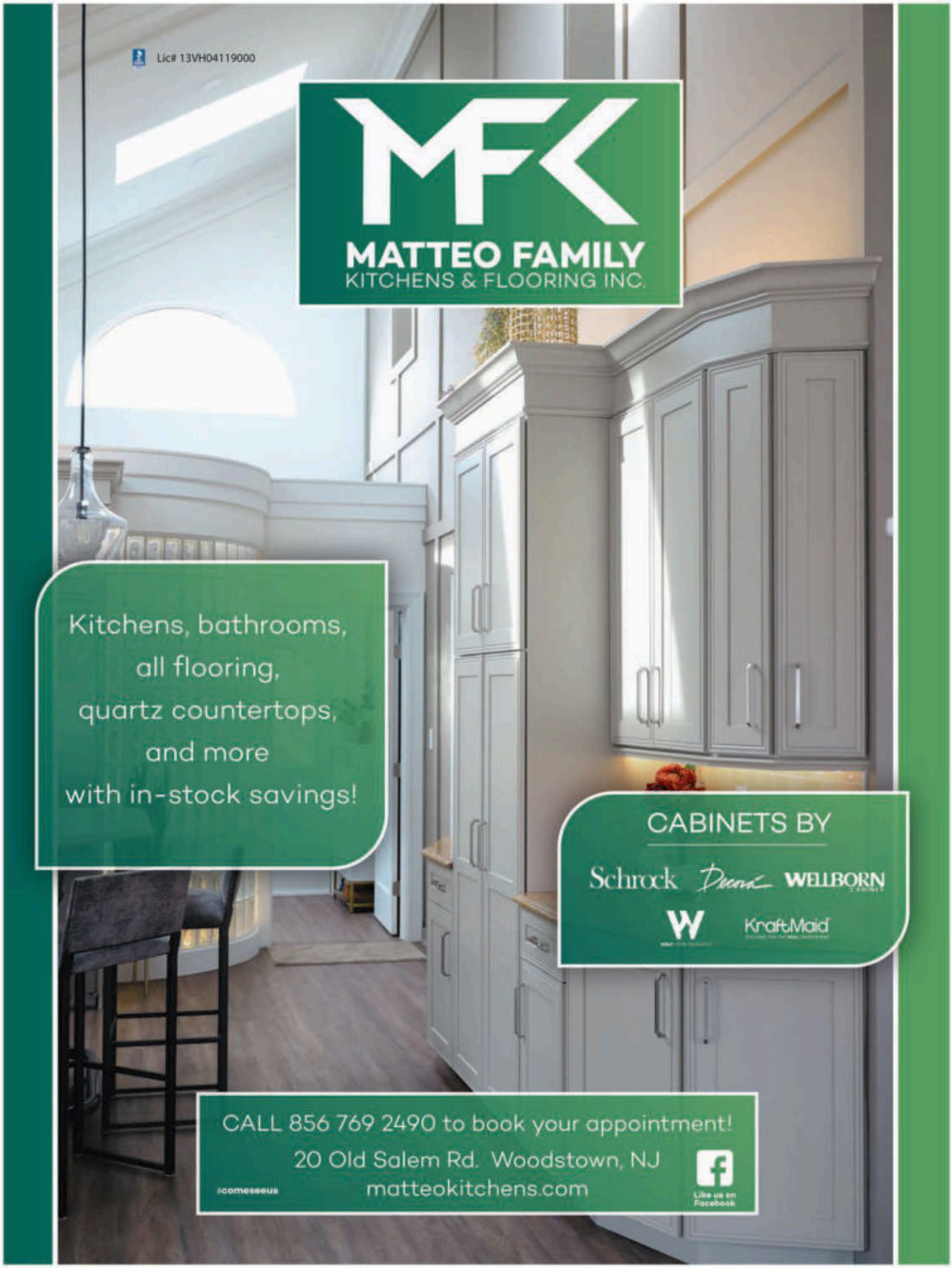
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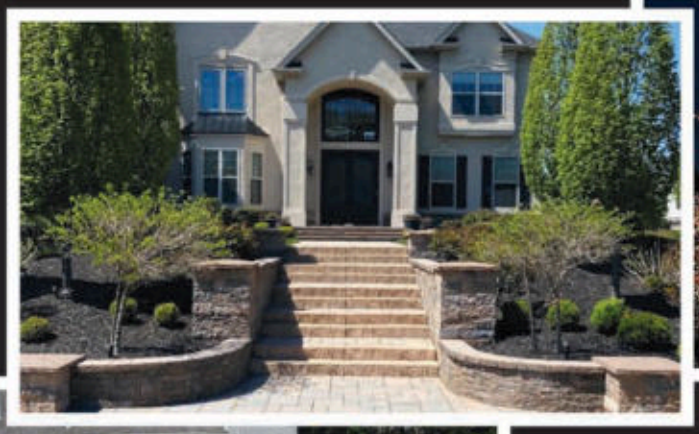
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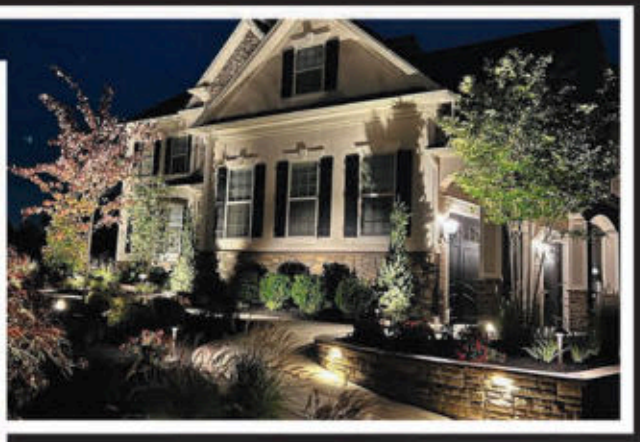
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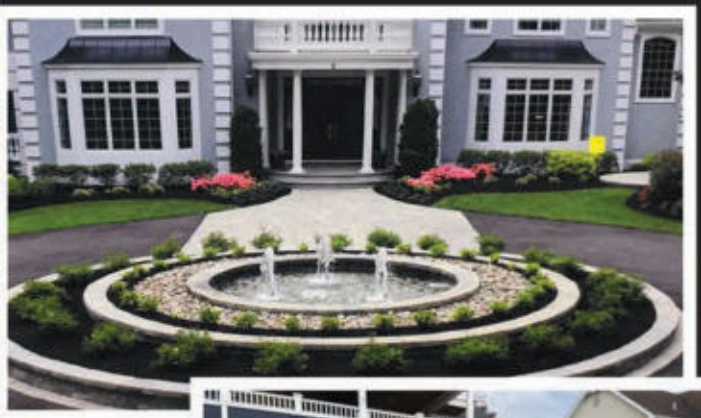


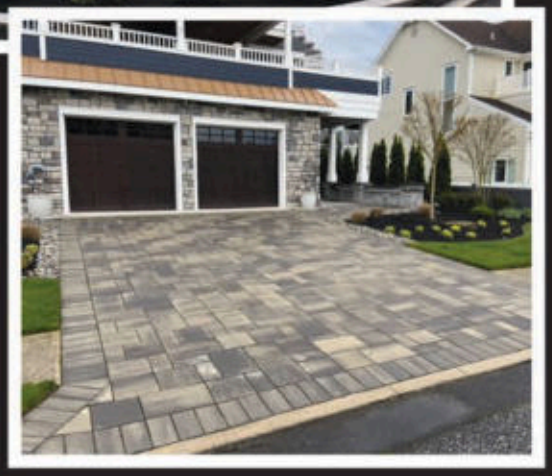


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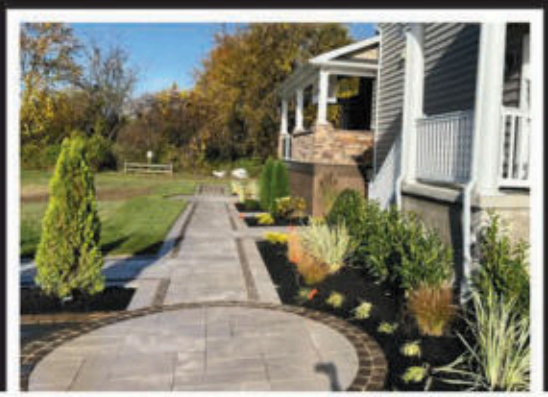


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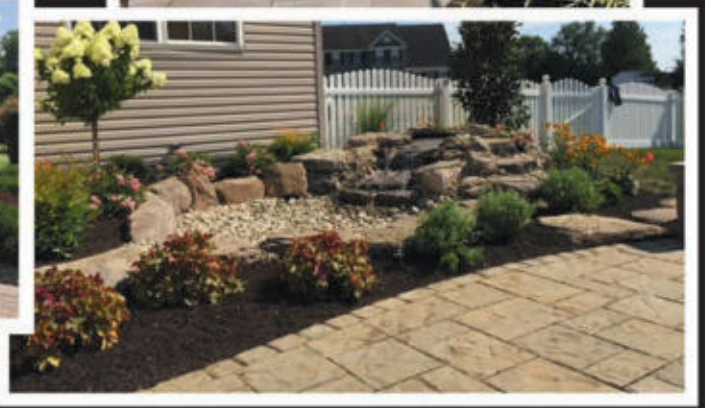
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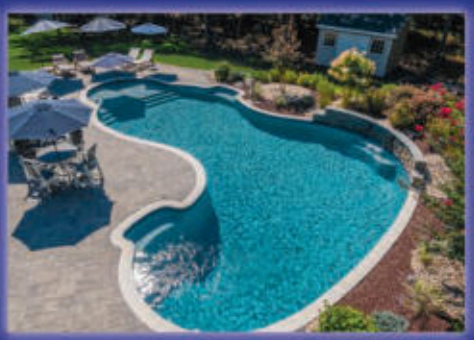




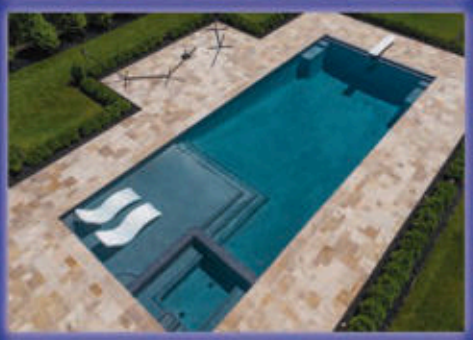
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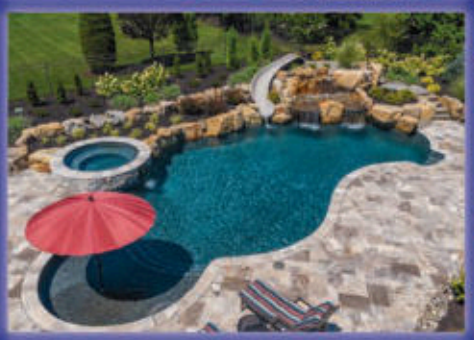
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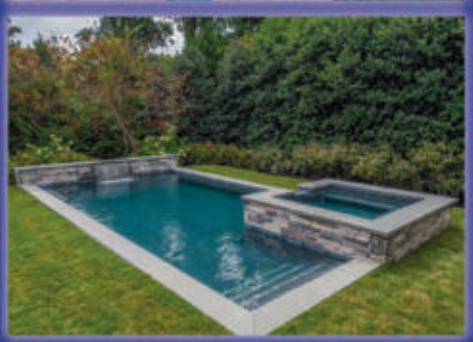




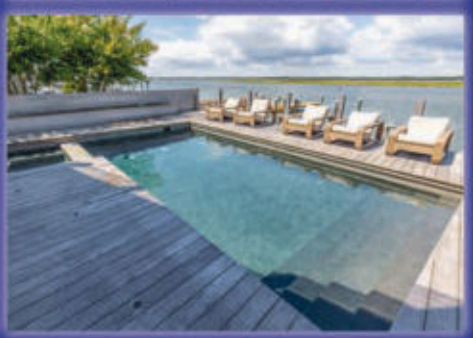












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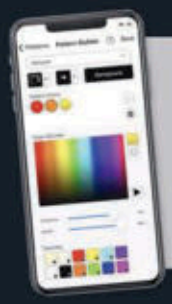




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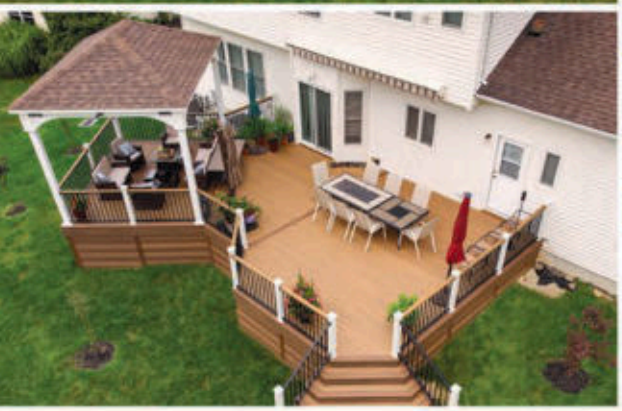
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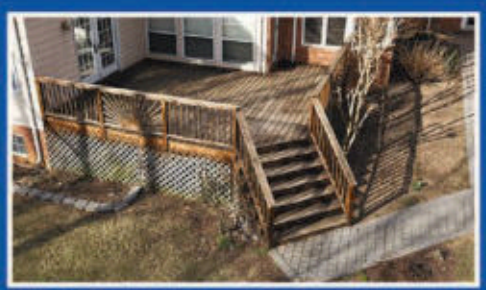




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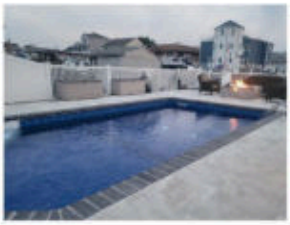




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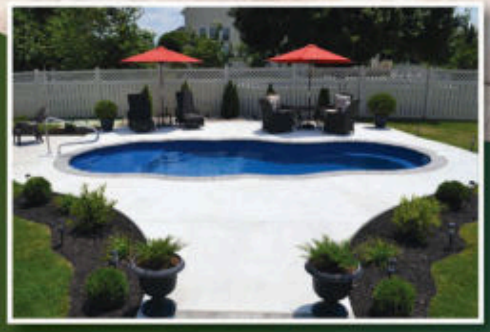
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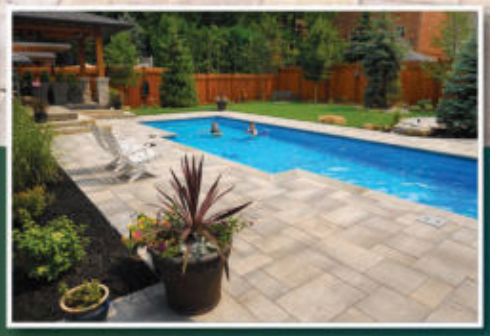
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Elevated Exteriors

Exploring the plethora of effective decking options takes an outdoor living space—and the entire home—to new heights.

BY CARLY MURRAY

A stylish and functional deck can be the centerpiece of a memorable summer, and the modern, multifaceted approach to decking allows for an expansion of the home. Traditionally a place of outdoor observation, gathering and relaxation, decks in 2024 often include the additional features of outdoor kitchens, pergolas, gazebos, screens, fireplaces and more. The consistently growing trend of creative customization is no longer limited to interior design or landscaping, enhancing both a space and residents' quality of life.



Deck Aesthetics

Home renovation projects have the best results when they are coordinated with each element of the home, culminating in a harmonious structure with every detail taken into account. When it comes to decking, one should be mindful of the adjacent interior space, the outdoor living space surrounding it and the exterior elements of a home. A property can be like a blank canvas, completely restructured for optimal personalization, but it can also act as a starting point to inspire a deck's look and utility

"Two factors dictate what your new deck should look like—it must be in proportion with the house and property, and it must be built large enough to accommodate the people using the deck," says Jerry Jerminski of Get Decked.

Colonial-style houses are characteristic of the Delaware Valley region, and that built-in historical charm allows for a guideline to help match a deck to the exterior. This is not to say that the preferred aesthetics are exclusively vintage, but rather timeless. When renovating or remodeling a deck, experts and homeowners strive to fuse contemporary and classic elements.

"A few years back, a lot of what we saw were modern looks. It seems that it has changed a little bit more to traditional, classic looks with a modern touch. [For] example, sleek rails, black railings—but still the classic wood look on the deck. So, it seems like the style is slowly moving toward a modern-classical look," says Ephraim Stoltzfus, designer at Deck Craft Plus.

Bold and bright colors aren't very common, so the general process is to opt for a complementary neutral color for the base and to style it with finishes or other parts of the accompanying outdoor living space. With all of the options available, one can pick the exact shade variation with undertones that are congruent with the rest of the space.

"They've developed a few colors that can fit in with the older architectural stone, and then the beige will come out. A gray will come out if you want to hit that modern farmhouse with a gray. They have colors that will satisfy both at the same time—pretty ingenious," explains Bill Wilson, co-owner of Amazing Decks.

Gray seems to be the top choice, according to decking experts in the region. It is the perfect amalgamation of sleek and futuristic tones with an evergreen and adaptable quality. Warmer and cooler colored accessory pieces further influence the look of the deck as a whole.

"I think gray decking is very popular right now. AZEK has about three or four different gray colors, and it seems like we sell a ton of those. Powder-coated aluminum railing mimicking the old, wrought-iron railing style is [also] super popular right now," adds Ray Ebersol, marketing manager of Decks R Us.

Similar to a primary gray color, black adornments are versatile enough to work well with a multitude of colors and styles. The neutral color also gives more freedom to play around with designs without appearing over the top.

"Our most popular railing color now is the bold, black-on-black design—black cross rails and black Deckorators balusters," affirms Jerminski



Elevated Exteriors



As every piece is essential to the fully finished project, the base of the deck may influence railing and step options, and steps and railing can impact the inclusion of lighting. Aesthetics can encompass visual and tactile appeal with materials, patterns and colors, but to take it up a notch, consider creating movement. Illuminate chosen visuals by intertwining lighting and guiding the eye to a designated focal point.

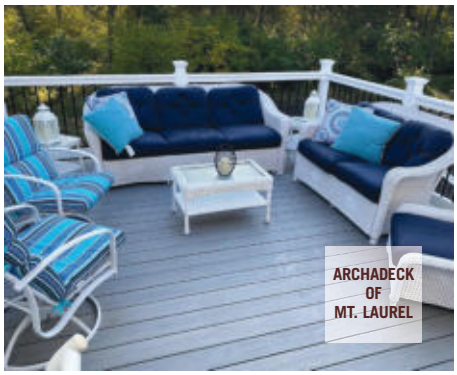
Deck Lighting

Lighting beautifies decking to a new level, and can range from practical to whimsical. Robert Lascelle, owner of My Deck, explains that colored lighting is called RGB lights, and they are increasingly gaining popularity with newer projects. However, practical lighting can still create an ethereal effect with the variety of options and cognizance of placement.

"Our viewpoint on lighting for a high-quality job…Your eyes should not focus on light fixtures, you're looking at the light the fixtures put out and that's what makes quality light jobs," says Lascelle. "Recessed under-rail lights [and] recessed under-stair riser lights are two examples "

Of course, any type of lighting will always require some sort of electrical accommodation. As with any home improvement project, careful planning is not just encouraged—it's a prerequisite. Jarrod Coburn, co-owner and production manager of Archadeck Outdoor Living of Mount Laurel, explains that the most common deck lighting—stair riser lights and rail post cap lights—does not require an electrician to install, but rather utilizes landscape wiring and a transformer with a solar sensor.

"When doing a new deck project or a complete demo and new deck replacement, it's best to decide on your lighting and under deck/skirting options before you start," Coburn says. "Running low voltage wiring to your stair risers and/or rail caps is much easier and cleaner if done before the decking is installed."



Add-Ons

The decision to make a deck an extension of the home demands cohesiveness, but that forethought in the design process is well worth the effort. Expanding the space also expands the realm of lifestyle possibilities. Personalizing a deck for each unique household's lifestyle guarantees that it will be where cherished memories are made.

"Imagine a perfect place for prom or wedding pictures. The multi-level decks cascade around the house towards their backyard with a gorgeous lake view," says Coburn, as he describes one of his most memorable projects.

Whether it is designing a platform ideal for family photographs above a stunning backyard oasis or considering architectural durability for a household with small children, the lifestyle needs of a home's residents are at the forefront. Many of these decisions equate to the idea of accessibility: making sure getting into the house via the deck does not require excessive effort with steep hills or unaligned entrances and adding features that are functional.

Exterior kitchens have made major traction in recent years, as they are highly customizable and add efficiency to the cooking process. When entertaining, a deck can give guests a maximized place to hang out without getting in the way of the food's preparation, and it can also allow for multitasking if cooking multiple dishes.

"You could have 150 people at your house, but they'll all hang out in the kitchen area. We call it the heart of the house. … It's very important that we make our deck an extension of that heart of the house," says Wilson.

Full outdoor kitchens contain almost everything one would expect in an indoor kitchen: sinks, pull-out garbage, refrigerators, drawers and cabinets. Lascelle explains that the main focus is usually a standard grill, but he has witnessed the emergence of outdoor pizza ovens and hibachi-style grills.

"We're doing a ton of exterior kitchens, they're a really big feature that we put on a lot of decks now that people really enjoy," he says. "You can have a full kitchen outside

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Taking in nature and fresh air is paradisiacal—with the exception of a few factors. Gazebos, pergolas and screens are other common deck embellishments that provide a picturesque quality as well as factors to ensure an optimal outdoor experience. This includes staying shaded, warm or cool in varied weather, and protection from bugs.

"Gazebos are a great way to screen in an area, to spend more time outdoors. Obviously, if it's bug free, this will enhance the experience ... [and] makes it more pleasant on hot days to sit inside of the gazebo rather than out in the open, in the sun," says Ebersol.

Regardless of any potential qualms about an outdoor living space, there is typically an inventive solution that can be built into a deck. For example, gazebos can have outlets, fans and tinted windows installed. Additionally, working with the railing and underside of a deck can best maximize the area. Stoltzfus exemplifies this problem-solving approach while discussing a unique project that he worked on last summer: a second-story deck with a fully custom outdoor kitchen and bar underneath.

"We put a dry space underneath, outfitted with lights of course and some ceiling fans. We put stone columns from the ground to railing height, and we put screens in around the bottom of that deck. ... The face screens were all electrical screens, and we put a double-sided fireplace under the deck as well," he recounts.

A desired vision is a major first step toward the deck of one's dreams, and previously inconceivable attributes are more accessible than ever. Consulting an expert can traverse imaginative ideals and conceptualize them into reality, guaranteeing a deck you and your family will love. H&H

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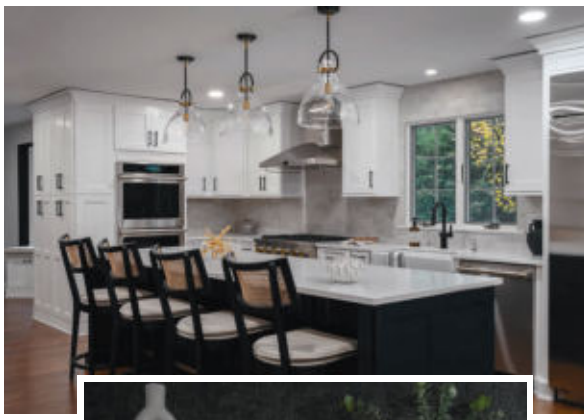
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YOUR HOME IS AN EXTENSION OF YOURSELF. FROM THE STYLE TO THE DÉCOR, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO SEPARATE THE DESIGN OF A HOME FROM ITS OWNER. However, not every space is a perfect match, and in this competitive housing market it's difficult to hold out for that perfect space—that's where remodeling comes in. Remodeling provides homeowners the opportunity to make the space uniquely their own without holding out or breaking the bank on a total breakdown.

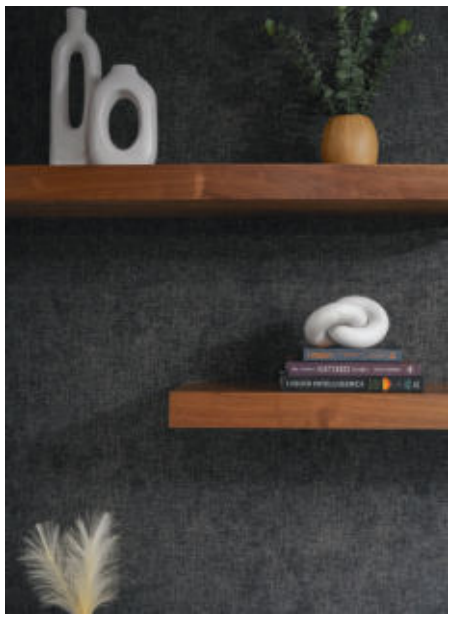
House & Home spoke with award-winning designer Sophia Amiano from Amiano & Son Design-Build about one of her favorite design styles, "quiet luxury," and how she incorporates it into home remodeling designs to add elegance to a space without being too abrasive.





Sophia Amiano, home designer





WHAT IS "QUIET LUXURY?"

Quiet luxury is when multiple elements of texture, monochromatic colors and materials are designed in a beautiful palette—not to compete with one another, but to come together in beautiful harmony. The major key to quiet luxury design is intention. Everything has its place, and as those places may be seemingly minimal, they are major factors toward the overall finished look of the space. Quiet luxury also embraces the idea of timelessness in the home. The idea is to cultivate a space that feels thoughtfully designed without overwhelming the senses.

HOW DO YOU INCORPORATE IT INTO YOUR DESIGNS?

I incorporate quiet luxury into my home designs mainly by material aspects as well as the overall layout of the design. Tile selections, cabinetry and flooring are all elements that need to come together to create a cohesive finished product with the original goals in mind. In a kitchen design, quiet luxury may look like panel-ready appliances for one client, while for another it may play into their cabinetry finishes or wood species selections, when applicable. Quiet luxury in a bathroom plays into the multiple tile selections from the shower to the flooring coming together to tell a story. Natural stone, porcelains, stone tile, geometric tile and the colors of those tiles all play such a huge role in this style of design. How you bring these multiple selections together needs to be thought out carefully so all materials flow and do not look stagnant in a space.

HOW DO YOU WORK WITH CLIENTS TO CREATE A SPACE THEY LOVE?

From the time I complete the first initial site measure/discussion with the client, I talk with them about what it is they are lacking now in their space. To me, this comes first and foremost. What do they need to get out of this remodel? Function? Style? Then, I like to dive deeper into that discussion. Whether it is function or style, what is the plan for the home? Is this the client's forever home, or do they have a 10-year plan? Whichever case it may be, I always keep the client's personal touch in mind, as no one will fully enjoy their space if they base every decision off of resale or what they are currently seeing in the magazines.

Through my design and planning process, I work one-on-one with my clients in private meetings held at one of my showroom locations so we can completely home in, in a comfortable environment, surrounded by cabinetry, tile, flooring, cabinet hardware, plumbing and more, all under one roof. Condensing all materials as well as design space into my showroom locations gives me the opportunity to provide my clients with all options. Seeing them in-person all at once, without the hassle of going to different stores and breaking up the process into multiple design meetings, ultimately eliminates confusion for the client and deflection from the vision of the design. H&H



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A Matter of Trust

When it comes to finding the right contractor for the job, **Emmons Remodeling** offers clients both expertise and peace of mind.

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 Remodeling, a company that has been offering expert care for South Jersey and the Jersey Shore area since 1996. They are a wellknown 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 "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? Stephanee 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, leaving you with problems.

"We are a local small business in Williamstown with real people answering the phones—not an answering service," Matthew 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 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. Stephanee says that the last thing Emmons wants to see is people in their local community get taken advantage of by unscrupulous roofing, siding and window contractors.

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

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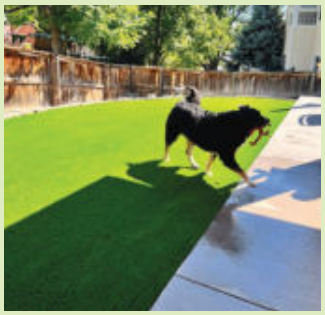
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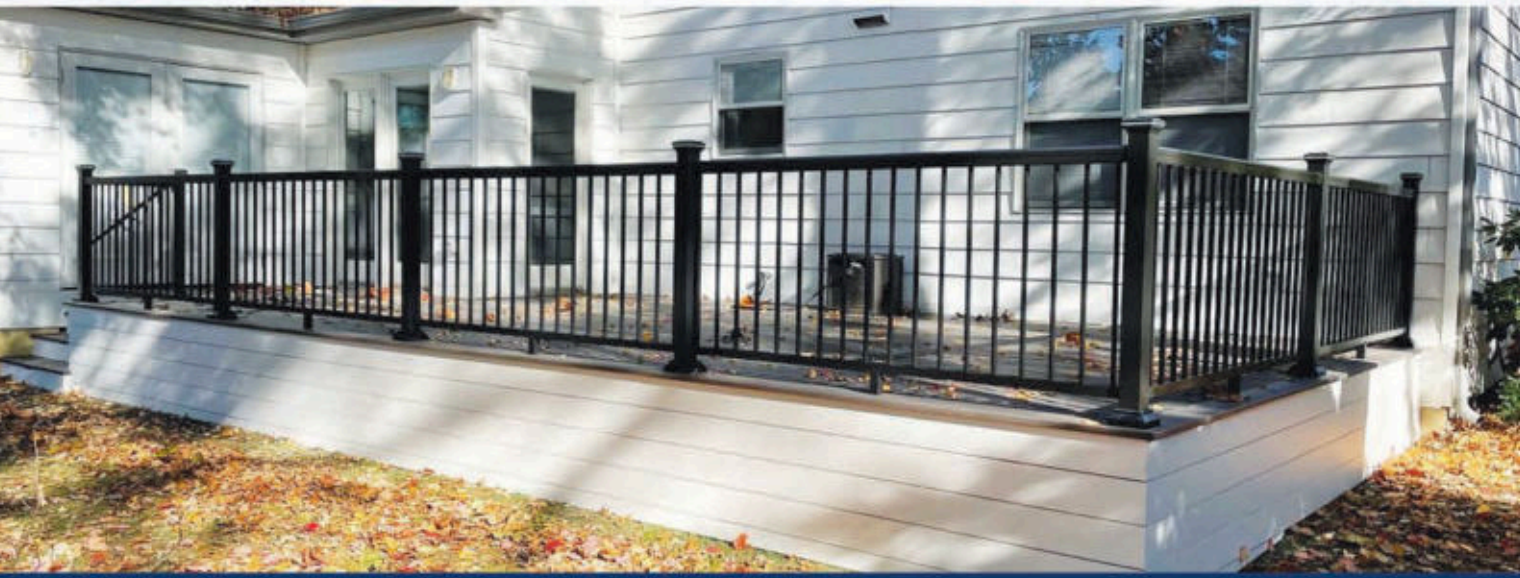
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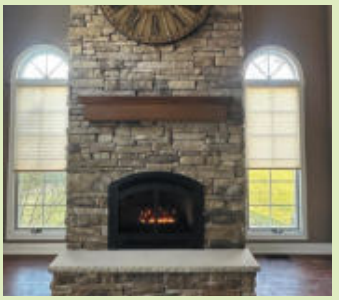
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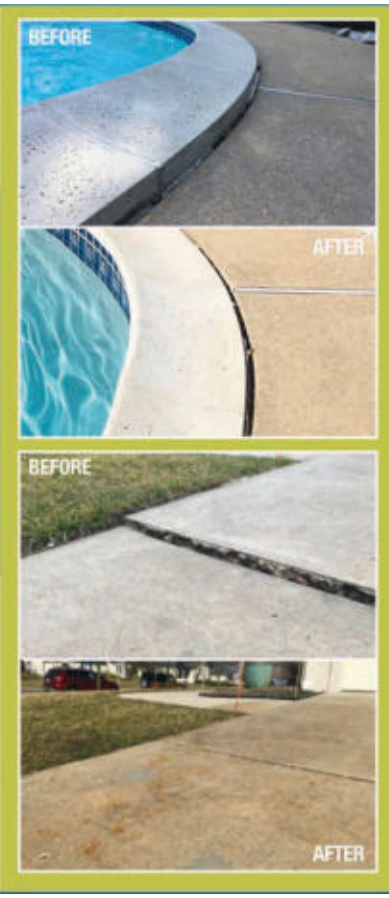
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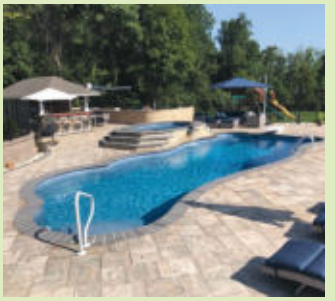


Del Val Pools & Spas is one of the leading custom pool builders in southern New Jersey serving the tri-state area and excels in bringing a client's vision to reality. Del Val provides custom in-ground gunite pool construction, above-ground pools, renovation, service and retail needs with three locations in Turnersville, Mantua, and Elmer, NJ. Frequently consulted by municipalities for technical and engineering expertise, Del Val's finished products have been featured in a number of publications, brochures and articles. Del Val Pools & Spas maintains an A+ rating with the Better Business Bureau and has received "Best of" Awards in a variety of southern New Jersey publications.
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by Lindsey Getz



Set Up Your Space for Summer

At **Sequoia Out Back**, customers can find endless inspiration for their outdoor dreams.



It's safe to say that the pandemic has taught us to appreciate the outdoors even more. While backyard outdoor living areas have been soaring in popularity for years now, for many, the stay-at-home orders and the experience of being stuck indoors for so long have made homeowners absolutely crave these spaces more than ever. They are truly a must-have—a fact that's been increasingly evident at Sequoia Out Back, where owner John Keller says that he's seeing even more people come into the showroom than ever before.

From the moment that homeowners walk through Sequoia Out Back's front doors, the experience is really unlike any other. The 30,000-square-foot showroom has everything you could want for your personal oasis on display so that you can envision it in your own backyard.

When you walk through a typical patio store or a big-box store, items aren't usually set up or paired together the way they would be in your backyard so it can be difficult to visualize your finished space. At Sequoia, you can see an entire outdoor living space the way that you might set it up on your own patio. It inspires so many ideas.

The goal of the showroom has always been to make homeowners feel like they're stepping into a real-life outdoor space. This helps homeowners to make the best choices when it comes to furniture and decking supplies that will work for their own projects.

Pair these gorgeous displays with the knowledgeable and helpful team members who are ready to assist—and homeowners can really appreciate the showroom visit



At Sequoia, you can see an entire outdoor living space the way that you might set it up on your own patio. It inspires so many ideas.

experience. Customers always leave Sequoia with a lot of great ideas and information.

Of course, in general, inventory has been a major issue since the start of the pandemic. Homeowners who have tried to purchase furniture and decking may have noticed limited stock. But Sequoia Out Back has been fortunate to be able to keep a lot of inventory in stock thanks to its relationship with manufacturers and its purchasing power, as well as having a large quantity from the start. Even so, with so many people coming through the doors, now is the time to start planning for the spring while inventory is still available.

After all, before you know it, the weather will be consistently warm, and we'll all be spending even more time outdoors. Homeowners want to make sure their space is ready now!

"The sooner you can start planning, the better," urges Keller. "The number of visitors coming to the store right now is higher than ever for this time of year. It's definitely not too early to start thinking about setting up your outdoor space."

As you start planning, Sequoia Out Back has all of the amenities that you might want to consider. This includes fire pits, patio furniture and all of the material supplies including decking and railing and hardscaping. Sequoia works with all of the leading manufacturers including TimberTech, Wolf, Trex, Zuri and Fiberon—all of whom continue to offer innovative products.

Whether you're a do-it-yourselfer or someone who was sent by their contractor to look for materials, Sequoia's showroom can accommodate everyone.

It's all about making the experience as easy and as enjoyable as possible for homeowners. As the true outdoor living experts, Sequoia and its team are ready to help make homeowners' backyard dreams come true.

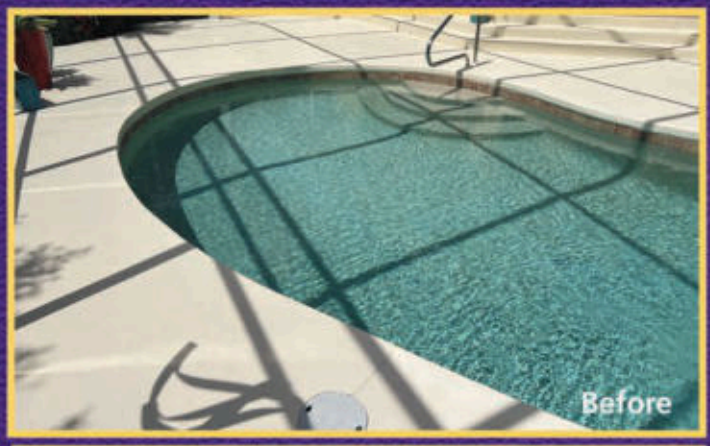
"Outdoor living has been a trend for a long time but it's hotter than ever," Keller sums up. "I think we're all ready to start spending more time outside." **H&H**

Sequoia Out Back

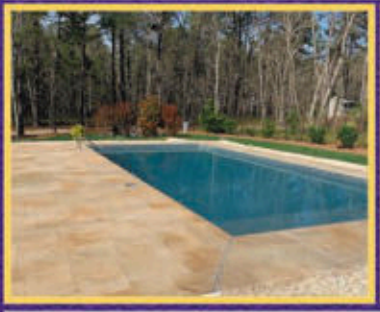
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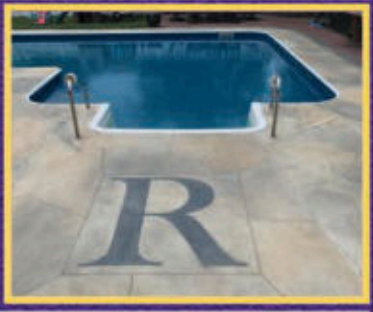


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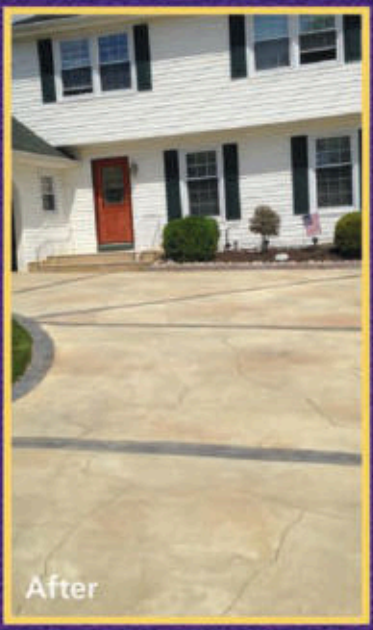






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ask the expert

New Castle Artisan

by Brittany Ann Morrisey

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 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.

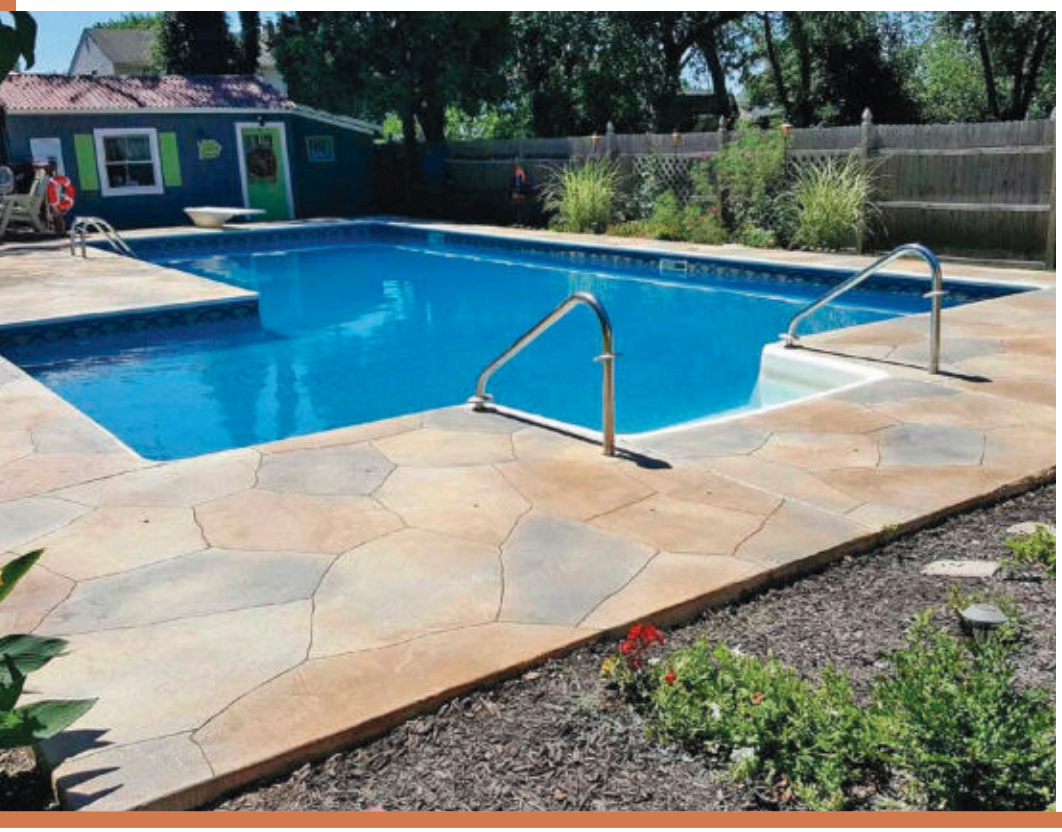
YOU ALSO RESURFACE POOL DECKS. HOW COST EFFECTIVE IS THAT?
The cost to rip out and replace a pool deck is usually considerably more than resurfacing. Being that most pools are located in the backyard, just the concrete can cost up to 35 percent more because they have to wheelbarrow it in, which is labor intensive.


Gwen Kunkel and brother Paul Randall of New Castle Artisan

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.

DO YOU DO CUSTOM COLORS AND DESIGNS?
Yes! New Castle Artisan offers you a variety of shades and textures for your concrete resurfacing project. Plus, you can choose from a large selection of design templates, or even submit your own! It's our passion to ensure we create something you'll love to live with!

HOW MUCH EXPERIENCE DOES NEW CASTLE ARTISAN HAVE?
The experts at NewCastle Artisan have over 30 years of experience in the concrete resurfacing industry. Our family-owned and operated business has locations in both New Jersey and Florida. We work daily with multiple generations of artisans to ensure your property gets the best of our expertise. H&H



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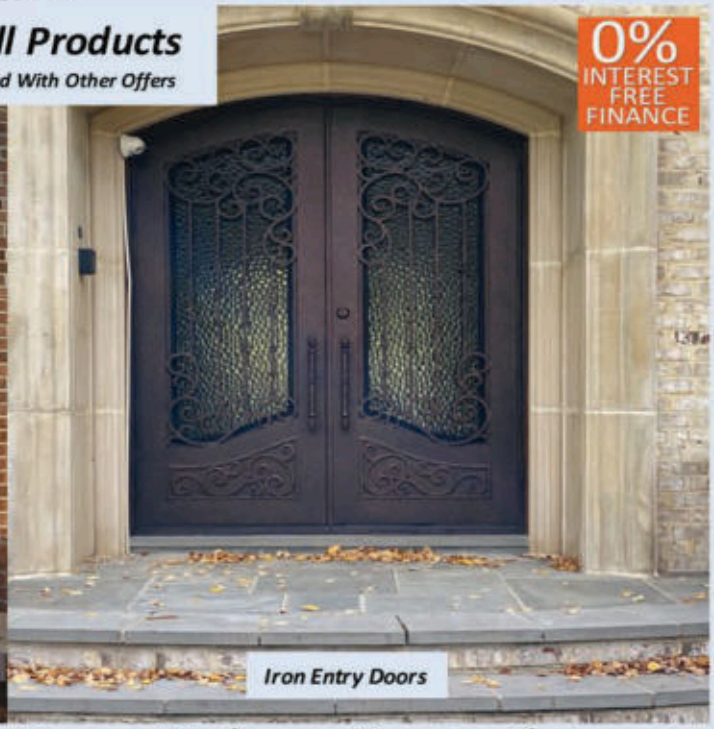
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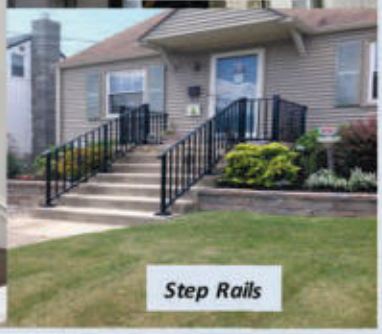
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Building a Custom Gunite Pool on a Budget

Del Val Pools & Spas alleviates homeowners' headaches with years of experience and a proven approach.



They say the only thing constant is change, and that certainly is true for the pool-building industry. Before COVID, there were above-ground pools, inground pools with liners, and then custom gunite pools, which were considered the high end of the industry. And while DelVal Pools & Spas builds all three types of pools, its niche as a third-generation business is in the custom-designed gunite construction.

COVID kept the world at home; vacations simply did not happen. No one wanted to go on an airplane. No one wanted to go on a cruise ship. We looked to our backyards for the new family vacation spot and the word "staycation" became mainstream vocabulary. During COVID, Del Val Pools & Spas was very busy transforming one backyard after another into a personal oasis. An interesting thing happened during this time, which affected prices on above-ground and inground pools with liners—prices on plastics and anything that used ingredients in the formation of plastics skyrocketed. As happens when things increase in cost, they rarely go back down. The price gap between a custom gunite pool and other types of pools closed.

Things are stabilizing in the markets with COVID and product shortages in the rearview mirror, but now there is a new question being asked: "How do we build a custom gunite pool on a budget?"

It's become a new favorite question because Del Val has the best solutions. Yes, building a pool costs money; that's no secret. It's an investment, but one of the secrets to any business is how to control costs so you can stay ahead of the competition. Here's how that's accomplished at Del Val, allowing the company to grow and to excel year after year, all while keeping costs down.

BUY MATERIALS IN BULK AND IN QUANTITIES TO LAST FOR SEVERAL YEARS. Rarely do things go down in price. Each year Del Val projects what materials it will need in the coming 12 to 36 months. This ranges from chemicals to maintain pools, to pumps, heaters, piping, rebar steel, tile, coping—anything needed for pool construction. By purchasing in volume and projecting needs out over several years, the company protects itself and its customers from market gyrations, which were quick and abundant during COVID. Who remembers the microchip shortage?

THEY DO ALL THE WORK. Del Val does not subcontract out any part of the pool construction. From initial excavation to programming your Pentair control panel after the first fill, it's all done by Del Val employees using Del Val equipment. It's always employees who construct award-winning pools day in and day out, bringing your vision to life. As a result, labor costs are not subject to the gyrations a subcontractor can bring to the mix. After all, nearly all of us have had a project started in our homes that ended up costing more than originally projected. At Del Val, pools are completed on budget.

CONTROLLING THE SCHEDULE. Del Val controls its pool-building process with allocation of labor and equipment. They are not dependent on anyone else to do the work, and while Mother Nature can slow things down for a day or two, Del Val has the ability to make that time up because of its dedicated employees and adherence to the schedule. In the pool-construction business, there is nothing more important than completing a project on time—and on budget.

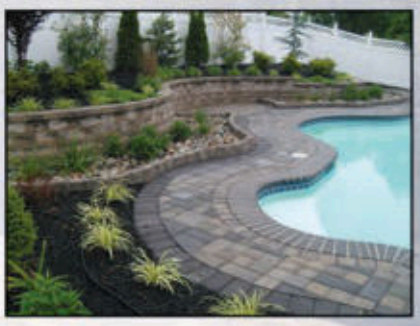
RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL BANKS FOR FINANCING. Not everyone is able to write a check for pool construction. The folks at Del Val recognize that, and therefore they offer a variety of financing options to help you complete your pool vision now, and pay for it over time affordably and at your pace.

SO HOW DO WE BUILD A POOL ON A BUDGET? Del Val controls the cost of materials, the cost of labor and the amount of time on site. It sounds simple, but it's only because of the company's experience that they can apply that business model. The third generation of this family business is active now, and perhaps in another decade they will be writing about how they do it better than their parents. Let's hope! H&H

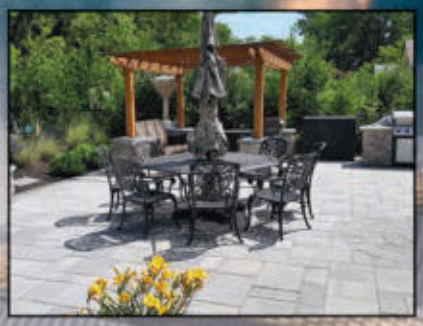
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More Than a Pool

Swim-Mor Pools & Spas elevates backyard atmospheres with quality custom designs

by **Kristen Dowd**

Swim-Mor Pools & Spas partner and general manager Mike McCool recognizes that there is a lot more that goes into a new pool than there used to be.

"The backyard has transformed over the last 10 years or so away from being just 'your yard' and into another room of your home with the same care and detail put into it," McCool says. "Because of this the design of your pool has become more than just a pool but the focus of the outdoor living room. There is a lot of coordination with creating what a customer's backyard haven is going to be."

Fortunately, the family-owned South Jersey business is more than up to the challenge of bringing a customer's backyard pool vision to life. In its 55 years of business, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas has helped to create thousands of backyard paradises throughout the region.

And what's more, they make the process as easy as possible for their customers.

"We're a start-to-finish gunite custom pool company—the design, the build and the service afterward," McCool says. "We have our own crews that handle the work which helps us control quality and makes the process go smoother."

There are six designers at Swim-Mor Pools & Spas who can help guide customers on a new pool design. The company's countless photos and 3D drawings can provide inspiration, and the final design is what best suits the backyard, according to McCool.

"Size, setbacks, elevations. We're here to help you work through that," he says.

Finding the right pool

"The first step is to give us a call. From there we'll set up an appointment to come out to your home," McCool says. "That way we can see all the aspects of the property. What the contours of the yard are. What the access is like. Even the best location based on where the sun rises and sets."

The timeline to get started is largely based on the homeowner and how decisive they are, McCool adds. Once everything is confirmed, things move to contract and Swim-Mor Pools & Spas starts working on permits.

"Time is of the essence. Permits can take from two weeks to several months, all depending on the municipality," McCool says.

Pool popularity

Prior to March 2020, business was strong for Swim-Mor Pools & Spa. That was only boosted when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the region.

"The pool business was never busier than it was in COVID," McCool says. "The lockdowns forced people to stay at home and they immediately focused on the backyard."

Although that business boom has settled down a bit, things are still busy. But pool trends, according to McCool, have held fairly steady.

Hampton-style pools have long been a customer favorite, but equally popular are the freeform designs, which can be customized to fit into any backyard environment.

"Through COVID there have not been many significant changes in the industry," McCool says, "other than the increased popularity of adding more bells and whistles to the pool."

Natural stone is popular for the coping along the pool's edge, McCool says, as well as darker finishes in the pool. A majority of Swim-Mor Pools & Spa customers are using a salt sanitation system and automated controls in their new pools, as well as choosing to add water features—waterfalls, fountains, deck jets and plenty more. The company also offers many in- pool fixtures for lounging—bar stools and benches that can tie into your outdoor kitchen or can run inside the pool, along with table areas, sundecks for your lounge chairs and custom fire features. Color LED lighting packages come with every pool, too.

The majority of customers also choose elements to lengthen their pool-enjoying season, such as heaters and spas. "It will extend your pool season by a few months," McCool says.

Why Swim-Mor Pools & Spas?

Being a local family-owned independent business makes Swim-Mor Pools & Spas a smart choice for customers, according to McCool.

"We're not national. We're not a franchise. And we do not try to sell everything. Our expertise has been building custom gunite pools for 55 years and that's what we focus on," he says.

Save for a few aspects that are legally required to be outsourced to independent licensed contractors, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas uses all of their own crews for the pool construction, which McCool says is unique for the pool business.

In addition to building new pools, Swim-Mor Pools & Spas also specializes in renovating gunite pools. The experienced team can handle everything from your standard renovation of replacing your coping, tile and plaster finish, to adding features such as raised water features, sun decks, and even spas that were not originally built with the pool. McCool says, "Even though your pool may not have originally been built with the more current popular features doesn't mean that Swim-Mor cannot add them now."

The 2023 pool season is already underway for the business, which thanks to the mild winter meant they were able to start construction early. Pool openings and service will ramp up from mid-April to Memorial Day.

But, for those looking to add a pool to their backyard this summer, it's not too late. "We're still building for this year. We're still selling for this summer," McCool says. "But don't waste time. Get in!" H&H

Swim-Mor Pools & Spas
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(800) 794-6667
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DIVE RIGHT IN

From the lifetime of memories it can provide to increasing property value and more, the benefits of installing and maintaining a pool are innumerable.

by **Chelsea Valcourt**

In recent years, the backyard has become the focal point of many homes. With quarantine limiting travel, folks were left in the confines of their homes—leaving many with plenty of time and reasons to finally conquer their long-desired home improvement projects. For many homeowners, desperate to regain some semblance of normalcy and life outside their four walls, these projects focused on making their backyards places of happiness, beauty and relaxation. People wanted a way to vacation without leaving the house, a way to exercise without going to the gym and eventually, a place to host guests once the pandemic sub-





sided. The solution? Pools.

From installing new and improving existing pools to building up the space around their pools with hardscaping and landscaping, homeowners have taken a renewed interest in elevating their space. After all, who wouldn't want to watch the sunset by the pool after a long, hot day?

With new customization options and rising design trends, it's easier than ever to achieve the pool space of your dreams. Working with experienced pool professionals can even help to combine both design and cost-saving measures—making those dreams a reality while keeping costs to a minimum.

House & Home spoke with some of the area's leading pool companies to solicit their advice on the best way to start the process, to maintain your pool and to turn your simple pool into a hosting space everyone will love.

When is the best time to get started on a pool project for it to be summer-ready?

"The best time to get started on a pool project is in the fall or winter, since the permit process could take four to six months with engineering and zoning. If the customer is installing something other than a fiberglass pool, which can be installed in one day, the customer can plan for a two-to-six-month installation, which would eliminate the entire swimming season. If a customer began the process now, and purchased a fiberglass pool, it is still possible to have the pool in toward the middle of the summer."

— Derek Blasker, president, Pool Designs

"It's best to start as soon as possible. Like any home improvement project it takes time to plan, design and build. Coming up with a design plan and then finding the best contractor to make that vision happen is a process. You have to give yourself ample time to research, interview prospective contractors and allow for a realistic time frame to accomplish the work."

— H.P. Wertman, director of operations, Premier Pool Renovations

When is the best time to open a pool?

"If a pool owner has a gas heater for their pool, they can open the pool as early as they are ready, but the size of the gas bill may prohibit such early openings. The pool owner should generally plan for at least two to four weeks to get the pool in swimmable shape, but a good closing and cover can cut down on this time frame. If the pool owner has a solid or tightly woven mesh safety cover, it is likely that little to no debris will be in the pool and the water quality will be substantially better than a standard mesh safety cover or tarp cover."

— Derek Blasker, Pool Designs

How can design elements come together to make your pool feel like part of the yard?

"This all starts with the design process. The placement of the swimming pool, terrace and the different features of the project are imagined by our architects and designers to create an amazing and functional outdoor space."

— Sam Waddell, president, SLS Landscaping

"Swimming pools used to be a separate item in your yard, completely disconnected in most cases from the design elements of the house. Now, many people want a pool and surrounding area that is used for entertaining and is completely integrated with the home itself. Continuity is easily maintained by choosing materials and elements that flow from the pool to the outdoor entertaining areas and even to the home itself. This is best achieved by utilizing similar surfaces, color palette, design elements, lighting and finishes throughout which will make the pool area seem very connected to the home. If your goal is to have your outdoor entertaining spaces and pool area feel very warm and inviting, then they need to be an extension of your particular design taste."

— H.P. Wertman, Premier Pool Renovations

What are some of the more unique pool elements folks could incorporate to take their pool space to the next level?

"We have created many unique and amazing swimming pools and environments over the years—



Image top left courtesy of Premier Pool Renovations. Image far left courtesy of Pool Designs. Image at left courtesy of SLS Landscaping



including elements such as fire bowls, waterfalls and sheer descents, grottos and spas, and swim-up bars, to name a few.

— Sam Waddell, SLS Landscaping

"A lot of people are going with sun shelves where it's 18 inches deep and you can put chairs in there. LED lighting allows people to change colors for ambiance and has become very popular. In addition, a lot of people are going over to salt generators for sanitation. Installing a salt generator means your chlorine is always the same and you never have to buy pool shock or anything ever again, so it's a money saver."

— Walter Beyer, owner, Stardust Pools

What are the best ways to take care of your pool?

"The best way to take care of your pool always starts with maintaining your water chemistry. If your pH is off balance or your sanitizer is low, the water will turn quickly and you will spend your free time testing, balancing, retesting, rebalancing, and testing again. Similarly, alkalinity and calcium hardness need to be balanced to not only maintain water quality, but the quality of your pool surface. In addition to balancing your water, pool owners need to be diligent with cleaning the pool floor and walls. If you leave debris on the floor for prolonged periods of time it can lead to stains that may not come out easily or may be permanent. If the pool owner has the financial capability to afford a robotic cleaner for their pool, it will greatly reduce the amount of work required to keep the pool surface clean and the filter on the robot will also aid in cleaning the water."

— Derek Blasker, Pool Designs

How can pool owners transform their space to accommodate for hosting?

"A pool and surrounding area is a great place to lounge or relax with guests but it needs to be so much more. This is achieved by having seating areas that have plenty of shade and protection from the ele-

Images courtesy of Stardust Pools





ments; large market umbrellas, pergolas and pavilions are great at accomplishing that. Having fire pits, fire tables and fireplaces is key in having inviting areas that can be used at night and even when the pool season is over.

Outdoor kitchens, grill areas and pizza ovens are a big trend in outdoor entertaining. Much like the kitchen is the main congregation point in the home, this can be the same outside.

Gaming areas are also now a huge element in the outdoor entertaining space. Having designated areas for games such as cornhole, horseshoes and ring toss is a great way to get adults and children alike participating in fun activities. Music is a huge part of any entertaining space and now with ever-improving technology there are more choices than ever to make this happen anywhere in your yard. Wireless speakers, or even waterproof underwater speakers in the pool are all great ways to get the music anywhere you are active."

— H.P. Wertman, Premier Pool Renovations

What are some things pool owners should be mindful of?

"When somebody's going to shop for a pool, they should see how long the company has been in business, if they're registered with the National Pool and Spa Institute and check with the Better Business Bureau. They need to do their homework these days because times are different. There's a lot of companies opening up and working out of their garages with no insurance. You want somebody that's been around a long time, has plenty of references and is abiding by all of the National Pool and Spa Institute rules that are out there."

— Walter Beyer, Stardust Pools H&H

RESOURCES

Pool Designs
Yardville, N.J.
(609) 257-2279
PoolDesignsInc.com

Premier Pool Renovations
Doylestown, Pa.
(610) 825-8808
PremierRenovations.com

SLS Landscaping
Lumberton, N.J.
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