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**MATTEO FAMILY
KITCHENS & FLOORING**

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*Why client feedback is integral to a
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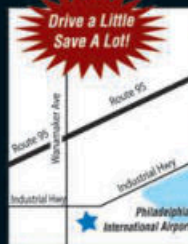
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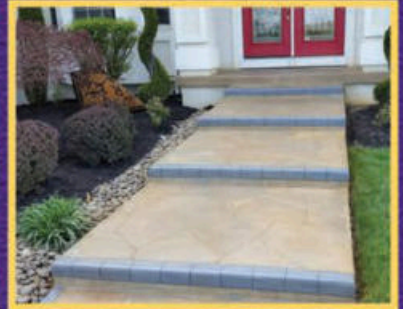
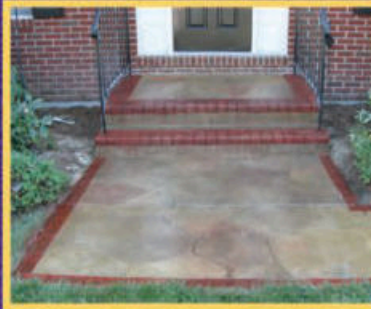


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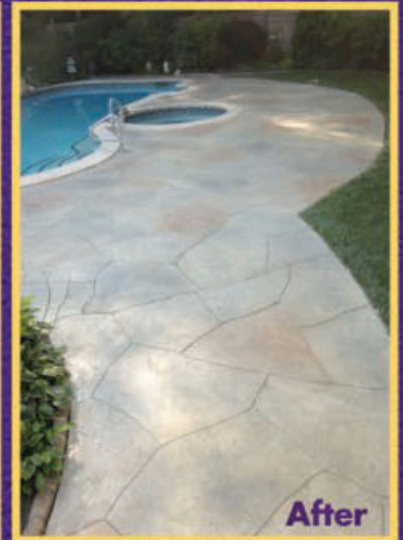
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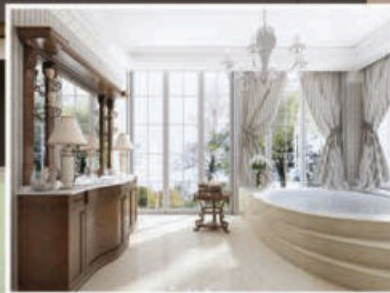
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On the cover:

Sequoia Out Back has everything you need to furnish your deck or patio. With the construction of a 40,000-square-foot retail location in Hatfield, Pa., Sequoia has created a total experience for those planning or furnishing a backyard space. For more information about the brands and products available, turn to page 30.

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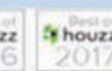
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INTERVIEW By Debra Wallace

Rachel Street's 7 Tips to Increase Your Home's Market Appeal

WHEN SHE'S NOT DESIGNING, RENOVATING, OR PURCHASING PROPERTIES IN PHILADELPHIA, RACHEL STREET ENJOYS SHARING HER TOOLBOX OF KNOW-HOW WITH HOMEOWNERS. As the star of her new DIY Network series *Philly Revival*, Street resuscitates historic homes and shares her expertise along the way. The show follows her as she buys, renovates, and then sells unique homes in the city.

We caught up with Street and asked her to share her tips to help a homeowner increase a home's market appeal.



1. First impressions count. Buyers look at the space and the light, and they want to imagine themselves living in the house, and not focus on the imperfections.

2. Little things mean a lot. Your real estate agent will walk through your home with a different eye, so before you agree to show your home, try to take care of the things that require TLC—the little ones and the big ones.

4. Don't rush to put your home on the market. Sometimes people want to sell their home and get it over and done with, but they overlook the fact that spending a few hundred dollars on repairs can get you more money. Even if there is a small piece of trim that stands out, buyers may ask themselves, "What else is wrong?" Spending that little bit of money up front is worth it.

3. Don't forget the front of the house. The front is the first thing that house hunters see, so make sure it looks great. The first photo on any listing is the exterior of the property. Flourishing flowers or lush plants help with the feel that the entire house is cared for. If the front door is very attractive, it will make someone look further.

5. Try lower-cost options to get your home ready to sell. Do a general cleaning and painting. Clean the house—including the carpet—cut the grass, and trim the bushes. When it comes to painting, steer clear of bold colors, which can be distracting for buyers. Light paint colors in gray, white, beige, or even a pale dusty rose, are better choices.

6. Big budgets are not always necessary. The first house I bought had a nice layout with high ceilings, but I had a small renovation budget, so I made some small changes. I had a bland kitchen with very little personality, so I bought cabinets ... painted them, and added new hardware. *Voilà!* It completely transformed the look of the kitchen.

7. Declutter before you put your home on the market. Do a deep purge to free up space. Empty half of what is in your closets, so prospective buyers see plenty of storage space. You want them to imagine where to put their furniture, and not be thinking that the first thing they must do is repaint that problem wall, or worry that there isn't enough room for their favorite items.

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Matteo Family Kitchens & Flooring

by Liz Hunter



EXPERTISE: KITCHEN/BATH DESIGN & FLOORING

Steve Matteo, Co-Owner

After 32 years in the kitchen and bath remodeling industry, Everett Matteo, along with his wife Elaine and sons Tom and Steve, went into business for themselves in 1995. When Matteo Family Kitchens & Flooring started, the flooring aspect wasn't initially part of the business, but with new home construction in South Jersey growing so fast, it seemed the most reasonable step. That's when the flooring division started.

Flooring remains a staple of the company, which includes over two decades of projects encompassing cabinets, countertops, carpet, hardwood and all other types of floors. Matteo works directly with some of the biggest flooring manufacturers, including Armstrong, Mohawk and Shaw, cutting out the middle man and providing cost savings to customers. "We take the time to explain all of the flooring options and put customers in the product that's right for them—not what's most expensive or what's on sale," says Steve.

House & Home spoke with Steve about how technology has helped flooring evolve and the attention to detail Matteo puts in to every project.

How have flooring designs changed with the help of technology?

Just like everything else, technology has improved floors. We've seen more changes in flooring manufacturing and design than anything else in this industry. In the '90s, carpet, which is a petroleum-based product, went

up in price along with oil prices. During that time, they improved the product with more stain resistance, building more quality for the added cost. Also, in the late '90s, laminate flooring like Pergo flooring took over the world, but once people realized it wouldn't hold up to water damage, it shifted to worry-proof flooring. Things went from hard plastics to softer, warmer, water-resistant options.

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

What shifts have you noticed in kitchen and bath design?

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

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

What is unique about how Matteo works with clients?

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

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

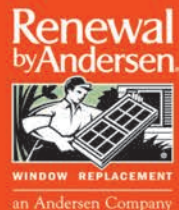
Do you also offer contractor recommendations?

Yes, we have a stable of qualified contractors who are all licensed, bonded and insured. We act almost like a matchmaking service, putting customers with the contractor who is the best fit for their project. We have some who can handle large-scale projects, and some two-person crews who prefer smaller projects. All of these contractors have been with us no less than 15 years. **H&H**

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Gill's Landscaping

by **Liz Hunter**

For more than 25 years, Gill's Landscaping has been providing South Jersey with landscaping and maintenance services. Yards have been transformed into lush landscapes with flowers in full bloom, accompanied by perfectly manicured trees and shrubs. The company also handles other features like ponds, accent lighting, hardscaping, irrigation and more.

Their reputation for quality and attention to detail has put them at the forefront of the industry, and garnered them recognition as Best of *House & Home* for Landscape Design. We sat down with sales manager Ed Swietanski to discuss what goes into planning the perfect landscape design with flowers and plants that will provide years of enjoyment and appeal to a home.

What are the primary steps involved in planning a landscape design?

We first want to meet with the client at their home and walk through the property. We'll discuss their vision for the space and bounce around ideas. This initial meeting should not be one-sided. We want the customer's interaction. It's important to know what they like, and probably just as important to know what they don't like. We're here to solve a problem, which might be adding curb appeal or replacing plants that have not grown properly. We'll put together a plan with materials we know will do well on your particular property.

How important is it for a client to have a budget?

We always try to get a budget beforehand. It helps us zone in on your priorities. We don't want to create a design only to find out it's outside your budget. We can still create something nice within the budget you give us. If you're



EXPERTISE: LANDSCAPE DESIGN



Ed Swietanski, sales manager

getting proposals from different companies, I recommend giving them all the same budget and then comparing estimates to see what you're getting for that money.

What are some popular elements that can be incorporated into a design?

Our goal is to create visual interest throughout the year. We don't want to create a static landscape that never changes. We try to choose materials that will bloom at different times. You might have a rose bush blooming in the summer, but then in the fall something else is providing that life and color to the yard.

We're also doing a lot of hardscaping, replacing walkways with paver materials from Techobloc or EP Henry. LED night lighting is also another popular feature that is becoming more economical and adds visual interest at night.

How important is continuing education for your staff?

This is critical. The state of New Jersey man-

dates landscapers take classes in order for us to hold our licenses. If you're applying pesticides or fertilizers or offering irrigation services—like we do—then you must have continuing education credits for the proper license. We make sure to maintain the integrity we have developed with the Gill's name.

What does it mean to be recognized as a Best of House & Home winner?

Getting recognized like this helps qualify what we do. Landscaping is one of the biggest investments you can make besides your house, and a poorly designed and executed landscape can make even the best home look bad, but a home that needs a little TLC can achieve great curb appeal with a well-executed landscape design. We stress to our customers that you get what you pay for, and we really pride ourselves in the quality of materials we use, and the ability to put them together in a combination that will look nice and give the customer the result they want. Being chosen for this award by the readers is a big deal to us, and only makes us want to get better. **H&H**

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Industry professionals provide their take on how to make your outdoor living space ideal for entertaining guests.

By Julie Shannon

With the warmer weather now in the forecast for the next few months, that means time will be spent outdoors (if not already) for many get-togethers with family and friends on the back deck. But do you have everything you need to make the space just right for entertaining your guests—including items to protect your guests and your house from the outdoor elements? *House & Home* asked local experts what features homeowners should have in their outdoor living space to make their house the ideal hangout spot, what items are must-haves for entertaining and at the same time functional, and how to customize every detail to your liking.

Q: *I want to entertain guests this summer. What types of outdoor furniture do you recommend I have in my outdoor living space?*

"Entertaining outdoors involves comfortable chairs and sofas for relaxation and conversation. However, it also means having the correct dining furniture. The number of people you usually entertain and dine with will dictate the outdoor furniture you should choose. Dining tables that extend are very useful if space is an issue. Stacking chairs may be considered if space is a premium. Keep in mind this is dependent on the outdoor space you have. Your outdoor furniture style should be an extension of your indoor style—mid-century modern, traditional, contemporary, etc. The 'pop' can be provided by your cushion fabric choice and vibrant colored throw pillows."

Charles Hessler, executive vice president
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Q: *What hardscaping materials do you recommend for outdoor living spaces? Are there any that have little to no maintenance?*

"Most all the products that are made to be outside will work, from natural stone to Cambridge Pavers with ArmorTec. Cambridge Pavers with ArmorTec will not fade or wear over time so the color and texture will last. Flagstone is probably the lowest maintenance product. All concrete products are very low maintenance, but we do suggest protecting all your outdoor material to keep it looking new and clean. The best way to help you choose what you want is to show you ideas. We have a large display area here at Landis Block & Concrete outside. This helps show the colors in sunlight, and you can get a real feel for what it's actually going to look like. We also have plenty of product guides and photos showing completed jobs. A picture speaks a thousand words."

**Jarrod Nyce, vice president
Nyce Concrete and Landis
Block & Concrete
Souderton, Pa.
(215) 723-5506
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Q: *What are the benefits of having an awning for entertaining purposes?*

"Three words can sum up the advantages of adding a canopy to your home: protection, savings and enjoyment. Aside from protecting you and your home's interior draperies and furnishings from the sun's harmful rays, canopies can block between 55 and 77 percent of the summer sun's heat gain, which can help to reduce your home's energy cooling consumption up to 60 percent. Being able to use your deck or patio rain or shine affords you more opportunities to enjoy it and allows you to plan gatherings without concerns about limited indoor space or changes in weather. You'll no longer need to cover your nice outdoor cushions or furniture when rain is expected and you can plan outdoor parties and other get-togethers without having to consider rain dates."

**Russ DiBella, owner
RJ Custom
Awning Co., LLC
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Q: *How many different types of awnings are there, and what are the differences between them?*

"There are two main types of awnings—retractable and fixed, with a bunch of subtypes under each. Underneath retractable, you have the self-supporting, projecting awning that most people think of when they hear 'retractable awning,' but you also have a variety of other shade products, like pergola awnings and curtains. Within the fixed category, there is even more variety. Most people think of patio and entrance canopies in this category, but there are also window awnings, valances, porch and deck awnings, and more. Beyond differences in location and function, there are wide varieties in style, price and durability within these categories. For example, within door awnings, aluminum construction is inexpensive and incredibly durable, while a fabric awning on a custom frame offers a step up in style."

Charlie Dwyer, marketing manager
Globe Canvas Products
Philadelphia, Pa.
(610) 622-7211
GlobeCanvas.com



Q: *I am interested in having a fire feature installed in my outdoor living space. How do I go about choosing the best one, and are they still a popular feature?*

"Outdoor fire is hotter (no pun intended) than ever. Not only does it create a warm inviting atmosphere, but it will prolong your outdoor season as well. I think with most people, sitting in front of a fire has a very calming and sometimes nostalgic affect on you. It's a time for sharing, laughter and reflection. There is something about a fire that can wash away the day's effects and one of the more meaningful items you can add to your outdoor space. Your choices of wood, gas or electric depends on your space. For instance, you don't put a wood burning fire pit on a wood deck. You can go as big as an outdoor fireplace or smaller like a portable gas fire table or patio heater. Consider your space and how you are going to use it. If you want easy with no fuss, go with gas. The amount of space you have is always a consideration when making your choices. Map it out so you don't overcrowd or underwhelm."

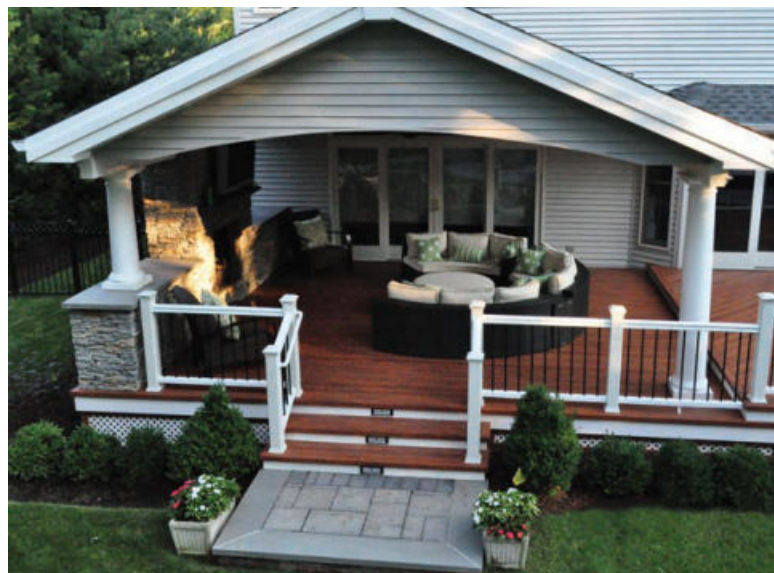
Kristen Fiorito, outdoor oasis designer
Salter's Fireplace
Eagleville, Pa.
(610) 631-9372
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Take the Party *Outside*

Q: *Is a deck roof a must-have item for entertaining guests?*

"A roof is a very functional item on a deck and is an asset to your outdoor living area. If you want to entertain, it has a lot of benefits. First, the ambient temperature under the roof on a warm day is generally about five to 10 degrees cooler than the ambient temperature on a deck without a roof because of the sun. It allows you to be on the deck when you have a partly drizzly day and still have a party. It allows you to be out on your deck on the hottest day and you'll be comfortable. It also extends the season much more into the winter. You can also customize your roof once it's installed by adding nice columns, electric and ceilings fans to name a few options."

Bill Lecorchick Sr., owner
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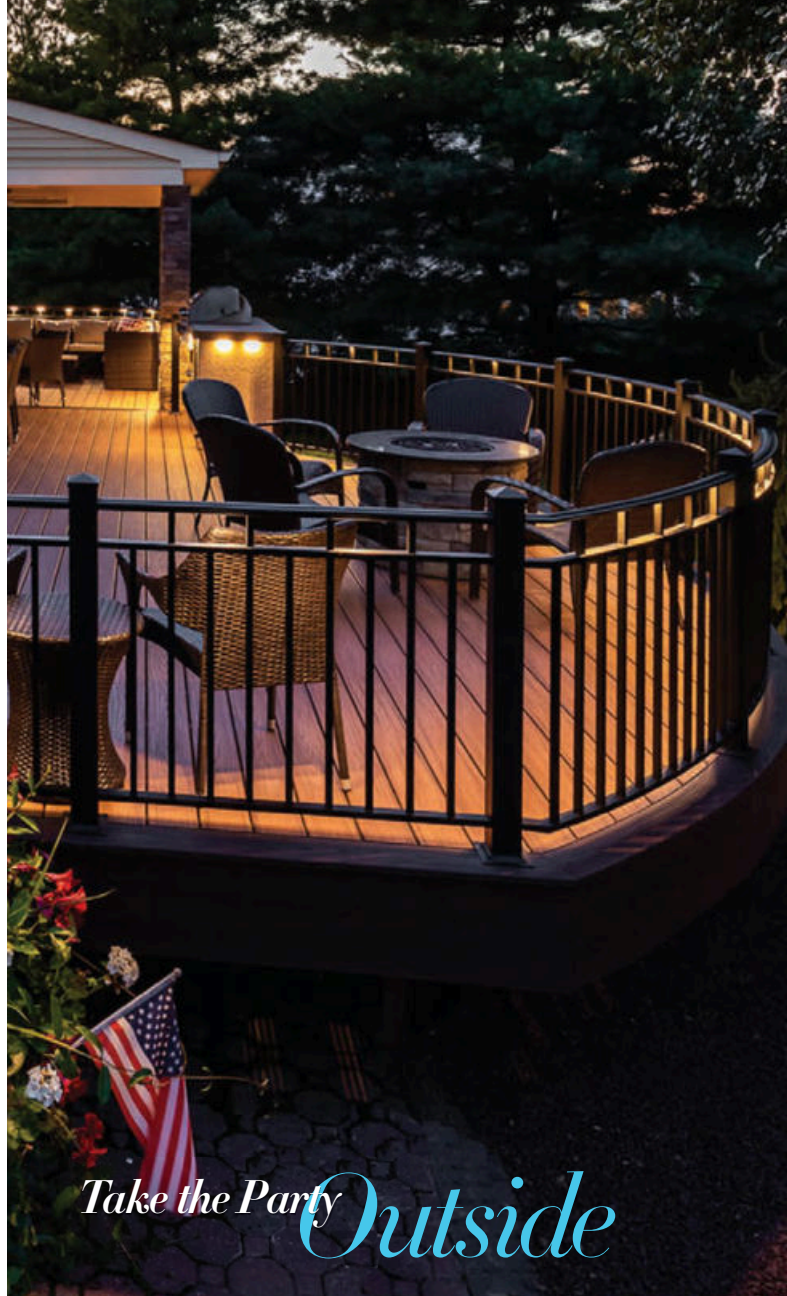


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Take the Party **Outside**

Q: *What custom feature should I add to my outdoor living area to complete the space?*

"Custom railings are an important part of an outdoor living space. It allows you the freedom to design and not be limited to a specific size such as custom aluminum railings, which can be made specifically for your outdoor space in almost any shape and size. They give you strength and durability with options of keeping the rail and baluster sections very thin and sleek allowing you to see better through them giving you a more open line of sight. There are all different types of railings like composite, PVC, aluminum and glass. Most of these options are kit systems which are mechanically fastened together. They come with a wide variety of infill or picket choices like round metal baluster, square, cable and even glass."

Joseph Kalnas, general manager
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TUNING UP YOUR

LANDSCAPE

FOR SUMMER

As the warmer days approach, here's what you need to know to help your investment last through the season.

BY DANIEL SEAN KAYE

Getting plants in the ground and a hardscape installed is all well and good, but between harsh weather and Mother Nature doing what she does, there's a lot you need to think about if you want your outdoor oasis to make it to the fall. *House & Home* spoke with industry pros for their best recommendations for a healthy summer landscape.

Softscape issues

Softscapes are the living elements of your landscape design—and the things most at risk during the harsh summer weather.

"Landscapes are no different than human beings. Proper water, food and preventative supplements will ensure your landscape to thrive throughout the season," says Michael Pasquarello, degreed landscape architect with Elite Landscaping.

He says that irrigation systems should be evaluated and adjusted annually to adapt to plant growth and any landscape additions. Also, fertilizer is very important. "Plants should be fed at least once a season to promote healthy growth. Insecticide and fungicide applications should be scheduled and performed at the times of the season when landscapes are stressed," he says.

On the surface, mulching and weed prevention



Image courtesy of KM Gardens Inc.







TUNING UP YOUR LANDSCAPE FOR SUMMER

are top priority.

“Overall, landscapes need mulching in the spring for weed suppression, water in dry times and the occasional weeding,” says Scott Silberman, vice president of KM Gardens, adding to make sure weeds are removed before they go to seed.

“Mulch should be tilled over, existing mulch re-distributed and mulched beds should get a top dressing,” says Diane Marrazzo of Marrazzo’s North River. “Weed seeds begin to sprout so a generous application of a weed preventative will keep maintenance at a low (if applications are consistently applied monthly). If you did not prune your specimens in the fall, as the new growth pushed forth, clean up now or you may need to wait again for many specimens.”

To avoid plant stress, make sure you water when it’s hot, says Chris Bianciella, owner of K&C Land Design & Construction. “For a good installation, space the plants correctly to allow them to grow into their space properly. And remember mulch keeps plants moist so cultivate it so dense and compacted mulch doesn’t impact root growth.”

Some homeowners may feel inclined to over-manicure their lawns, but a professional landscaping company can provide just what

a yard needs, when it’s needed.

“For grass, cut it higher after July 4 until Labor Day,” begins Andrew Savinson of Creative Landscapes. “For plants, prune and feed them at least once a year. Beds should be edged and mulched about once every 18 months, and use a double-shredded hardwood bark mulch and not dyed woodchips.”

“Have a professional touch your property at least once a month,” says Steve Compton, general manager, CKC Landscaping. “We’ve had unseasonable rainfall the last few years and professionals know the care your trees, shrubs and plant beds need. People want a ‘set it and forget it’ landscape but things don’t work that way. You need to pay attention. A professional knows the right mowing, fertilizing and care needed.”

Hardscape care

Patios and walkways can’t be overlooked and should have their condition evaluated before summer, both for safety and aesthetics.

“Mid-spring to summer, check for areas of settling or areas that need to drain or are heaving or cracked. Look for creaky boards, pointing issue, etc.,” says Compton. “If you don’t nip it in the bud, if you don’t repair or replace, a minor service call now could turn into a thousand-dollar repair next year. It’ll only get more damaged.”

“For your hardscape, general maintenance and upkeep makes all the difference,” says Bianciella. “Paver patios may just need a simple power washing. This prevents deterioration. A little attention after the install is all it needs.” However, as time goes on different

**PATIOS AND WALKWAYS
CAN’T BE OVERLOOKED
AND SHOULD HAVE THEIR
CONDITION EVALUATED
BEFORE SUMMER, BOTH FOR
SAFETY AND AESTHETICS.**

hardscapes require different things. “Weed growth means movement of the hardscape, so after a strong washing, add new polymeric sand. Also, using paver cleaners and regrouting masonry patios lead to longer lifespans for your hardscape.”

Savinson warns homeowners against power washing these surfaces on their own.

“Remember that for anything you want to have improvement for, the best thing is to have a professional take a look at it,” says Savinson. “Sometimes a power washing can be good but that depends on whether water has gotten into the hardscape and has done damage. Make sure you redo the mortar.”

Clean, re-sand, seal—these are the main ideas Pasquarello suggests. “A high-pressure scrubber with spinning jets will remove all surface discoloration and joint material (weeds,

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moss, soil, etc.),” he says. Chemical cleaners then open the pores of the concrete to allow better absorption of a sealer. In addition to adding polymeric sand to replenish joints, a water-based sealer applied to enhance the overall color of the paver also closes off pores to limit additional staining.

And to make your area even more special and functional, update your hardscapes by adding fire, water features and/or landscape lighting, says Silberman.

Final thoughts

For things to keep in the back of your mind, each expert has some suggestions.

“Don’t forget to water your trees through hot and dry weather, particularly ones like dogwoods that prefer to be in the shade,” says Savinson. “They appreciate a good soaking every three to four weeks.”

“If you have deck issues, call a deck professional,” says Compton. “They’ll know if you need to just replace [it] or do something bigger. They’ll fix things but can also advise you on how to tighten things up, when you’ll need a sealer and how doing certain things today will help your deck last longer and look better. You need to maintain things to protect your investment.”

Bianciella says there are some great new hardscaping trends including use of porcelain tile. “The oversized tiles have a nice look and can handle winters. It’s non-porous and never weathers.”

Silberman cannot stress enough the importance of adding native plants to your garden. “Natives attract tons of wildlife including birds, bees (not all are bad), and butterflies. The removal of invasive plants helps contribute to a healthy ecosystem especially when replaced with natives. A good example is Burning Bush. People love this plant for its vibrant fall color yet it is

a highly invasive species that reseeds everywhere and can completely take over, crowding out other more beneficial plants.” He says other options, such as Aronia (Chokeberry), will provide equally stunning fall color with the added benefit of having berries that birds love to feast on and will not take over the ecosystem.

Marrazzo takes all this to another level. “When you get into your garden, go with love in your heart and the plants will be receptive to what you are feeling and speaking,” she says. “Be gracious with your intentions when in the garden. Your garden reaps what you sow! Pleasant music while gardening is heard by your trees and plants ... and lawn too. Choosing happiness while gardening will benefit your chore!”

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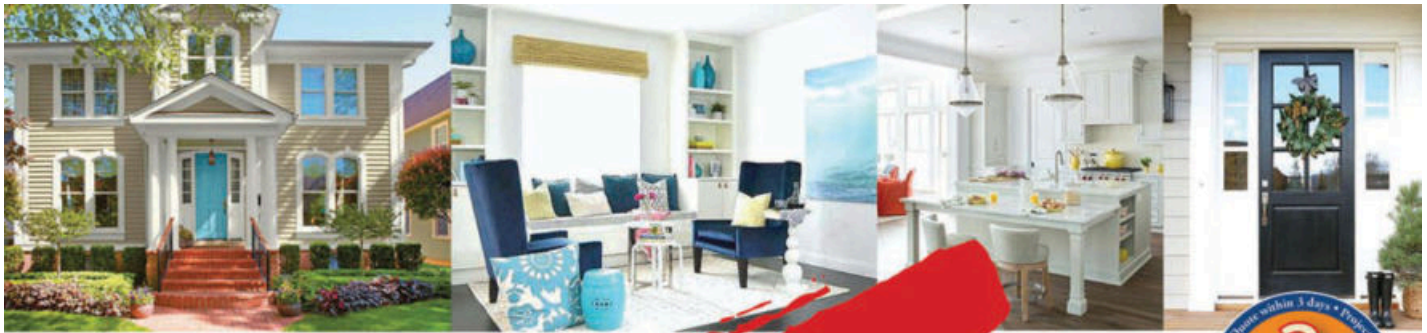
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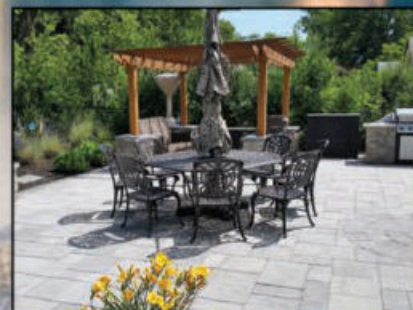
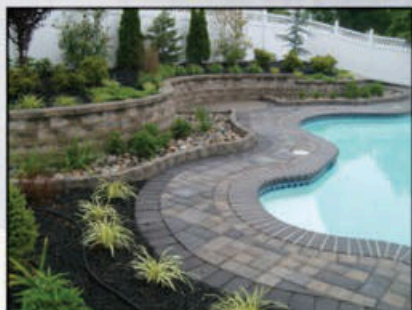
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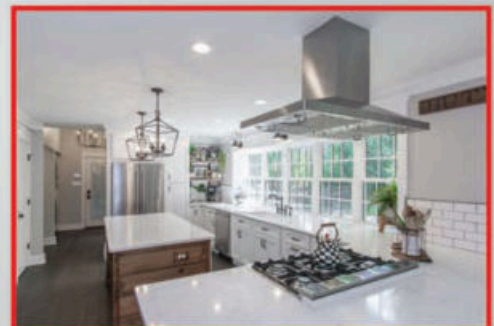
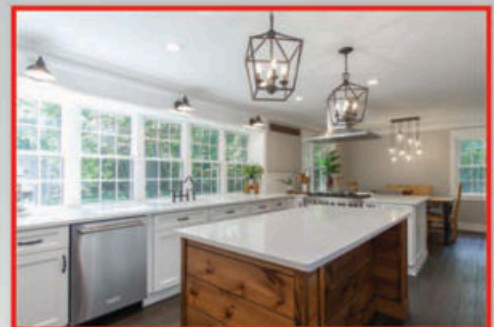
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For those who are counting down the days until spring, nothing beats the winter blues—other

than a trip to the islands—quite like a visit to Sequoia Out Back's stunning showroom. It is the perfect spot to forget about the snow and slush on the ground, plan a backyard oasis and daydream about the warmer days ahead.

The 30,000-square-foot showroom has no comparison on the East Coast, and as impressive as it seems on the company website,

it has to be experienced in person to get the full effect. That's why it comes as no surprise that some people journey hundreds of miles just to see it.

"People will come to check our showroom out just for the experience," owner John Keller says. "There's nothing like it anywhere, so it's worth the trip for sure. No one who makes a long trip to get

here is ever disappointed.

"This is the best time to come see what we have to offer. This is when we have the most inventory of furniture, and if you're building a deck or patio you want to give yourself enough lead time so you can enjoy it when the warmer weather arrives."

Keller has vast experience in the outdoor arena dating back to

his days as a deck builder. In 1998, he opened Sequoia Supply—one of the premier retailers of decking and railing products in the country—and he added Sequoia Out Back 10 years later to offer everything imaginable for outdoor living.

That includes beautiful, high-end furniture from popular brands like Gensun, Tropitone, Winston, Lane Venture, Pride, Woodard and many more. Fire pits and outdoor kitchens continue to be in demand for outdoor living spaces, and all of the necessary components can be found at Sequoia, such as a full line of grills and smokers. No outdoor space is complete without a shade element, and Sequoia has you covered with pergolas that not only add relief from the sun but an attractive design element as well.

Dozens upon dozens of displays are set up in the showroom complete with decking, railings, furniture and a faux-blue sky overhead to give customers a genuine feeling about the products.

“When we set out to build this showroom, our goal was really to make it life-like,” Keller says. “The displays are the size of the decks you would build in your backyard so you can get a good idea of how it’s going to look and feel on your own house. We also have all the amenities and furnishings once your deck or patio is finished.”

Keller and his team have

worked tirelessly over the winter to update all of the displays and ensure the latest and greatest products on the market are being showcased. In terms of decking, Sequoia works with all of the leading manufacturers—such as Trex, TimberTech, Wolf, Zuri and Fiberon—who continue to develop different styles and dazzling colors.

“

People will come to check our showroom out just for the experience.

There’s nothing like it anywhere, so it’s worth the trip for sure.”

— John Keller, owner

Keller is also excited about the new composite boards being offered that are closer in price to pressure-treated wood. “Although it’s the opposite in this area, across the country pressure-treated wood is still by far the leading product used for decking,” he says. “So Trex and TimberTech came out with new composites at a lower price point that we have installed in our showroom. In addition to being aesthetically pleasing, homeowners are drawn to these composites because there’s a lot less maintenance than with pressure-treated wood.”

Sequoia welcomes customers of every type, from those looking to start a DIY project to those who have been sent by their contractor to make product selections. A knowledgeable and friendly staff is on hand to answer any and all questions.

“It’s not really a showroom for browsing,” Keller says. “Most people need help and we are here to guide each one every step of the way. Backyards are big right now—everybody wants to be outside. We want to help them get the relaxing space they desire.” **H&H**



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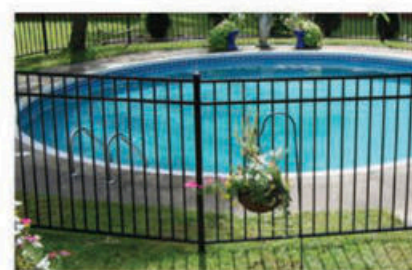
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Kristin GARDNER

GENERAL MANAGER, RENEWAL BY ANDERSEN OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA

You work full-time and you're a mother of three young girls. As tough as it is, it must be rewarding, too.

Working a demanding job while being a mom of three kids is full of challenges, for sure. But I'm so grateful I can be a strong role model for my daughters. It's so cool to work in a typically male-dominated field and show my girls they can do anything they want—including running a company!

Your affiliate location has won Renewal by Andersen's "Best of the Best" award five times in the past 10 years. More than 100 locations compete for the award, so that's quite an accomplishment.

I'm so proud of my team. They have a work ethic unlike any I've ever seen, always going the extra mile for our customers. As we continue to grow and our customers' expectations shift, it's important that we're always raising our standards. It takes a village to deliver Renewal by Andersen's Signature Service, and the "Best of the Best" awards are a special recognition of my team's hard work and dedication.



Your company's mantra, "With Love," encourages employees to use words and take actions from a place of love. What does "With Love" mean to you?

It comes down to making connections with our customers and putting a little more heart into how we treat them. I see my team doing small things every day. Acting with love and kindness has become a way of life here.

During a recent installation, our customer mentioned to one of our installers that his 90th birthday was just a few days away—and that he would be all alone. So, on the day of his birthday, our installer bought a cake and brought it over to the gentleman's home to celebrate with him. The customer was so moved by the gesture.

We're not just some giant corporation that only wants to sell and install windows. We want to connect with our customers and build relationships. I think that's what "With Love" means. It's not doing something for recognition or a thank you. It's doing the right thing because it will make someone feel good.

Your company has a charitable program called Window of Giving. What are some charities your group has supported?

Last year, we wrapped thousands of books for RSVP, a local volunteer program that helps disadvantaged kids, the elderly and veterans. We also supported Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, which helps fight pediatric cancer, and MANNA, which provides nutritious meals to people with limited means and medical conditions. Those are just a few that come to mind. There are many more!

What's one of your proudest moments at RbA?

Winning the Crystal Achievement award at this year's annual meeting was very special. I had no idea I was in the running for the award. I was floored! At first, I was a little embarrassed to be singled out. But then I realized it was because of the support of my team that I was being recognized. I'm just one piece of the puzzle in our operation. While my name is on the award, it really belongs to the incredible group of people that I'm blessed to work with every day. **H&H**

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Val TRAORE

OWNER AND PRESIDENT, FRESH COAT PAINTERS OF BURLINGTON – CAMDEN

How long have you been in this industry?

I started this business in 2018 with an experienced crew of painters who have more than 25 years in residential, commercial and industrial painting

Did you have another career before this one?

Yes, for 13 years I humbly served as the president and CEO of the Food Bank of South Jersey, the largest anti-hunger organization in the region, which provides food and nutrition services to more than 200,000 people in need in South Jersey. Prior to that I worked in similar capacities and organizations in Chicago, Virginia, Baltimore and New York.

When did you decide to go into business for yourself?

After a 30-year career in the nonprofit sector, it was time for me to make a transition and pursue some of my 'dream deferred' goals while still in my prime working years. Business ownership was one of those goals.

What appealed to you about this industry?

I've had painting projects go wrong and it's frustrating. No-shows, slow and sloppy and cost overruns. I knew there had to be a better way to provide quality workmanship and professionalism at a fair and firm price. Painting is the least expensive way to change a space and coupled with the right paint and painter professionals, you can literally



transform a life. That appealed to me on so many levels and as a woman business owner in a male-dominated trade, I knew that I could bring something different.

What has been the biggest obstacle to being a woman in business?

I have to say not much, and I owe that to being in a state that has so many resources to help women succeed as well as having customers who look at my gender as a plus, not a deficit. I actually have customers who will say they chose me because I'm a woman and they are impressed by the professionalism, quality workmanship and legendary customer service we deliver on every project, every time.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?

Women trailblazers—so many to name but the one that comes top of mind is Oprah Winfrey. As an African-American woman growing up in a period that did not value the diversity of women of all shapes, colors and sizes, Oprah's emergence gave a young woman like me at the time, the confidence and perseverance to define and go after what I want in life. She remains even today, my unofficial mentor.

How do you define success?

It's a daily definition for me now that says when we've exceeded the customers' expectations, balanced the budget and have happy employees, we've done well and I can sleep well tonight.

What is something you can't live without?

Music! Music is my therapy and I love all types but jazz is my absolute favorite and if it has a serious sax player, oh my!

How do you unwind after a stressful day?

A glass of cold Riesling, soaking bubble bath and my playlist. **H&H**

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Outdoor Entertaining

Does your space have what it takes?

by Michael Pasquarello, Degreed Landscape Architect, Elite Landscaping



Outdoor living continues to be the main driving force behind many residential landscape projects and will strengthen and grow throughout the years to come. The demand for innovative products which can be incorporated into the landscape and create spaces of refuge and entertainment has led the resurgence to bring people back outdoors and enjoy what Mother Nature has to offer. The following elements are must haves when planning and designing these spaces:

PAVILION ROOF STRUCTURES. Open-air, pavilion-style, solid roof structures are the ultimate way to create an outdoor shaded room which can be utilized in any weather. Pavilions have vertical posts/columns and can be tied into a home façade or built free-standing. They are a framed solid roof which allows for the incorporation of recessed lighting, fans, audio-visual, not to mention a force field from those burning UV rays. Shade is not the only way these roof structures can provide refuge from the sun. Misters can even be integrated into the soffit overhang to offer added relief.

OUTDOOR KITCHENS. The home kitchen always seems to be the main area of gathering during any holiday, birthday or party. Why? Food. There's no reason why a kitchen with all the same amenities (and more) can't be created outdoors. Grills, warmers, side burners, refrigerators, sinks, ice makers, pizza ovens and even beverage dispensers can all come together within your patio space. Most of these kitchen structures come equipped with natural gas, electric and plumbing. Granite countertops, stainless steel cabinets and drawers can also add to the gourmet cooking experience. Food has the capability to make families friendlier and turn friends into family. So put away those frozen hotdog and hamburger packets and prepare a spread worthy of a five-star restaurant!

FIRE FEATURES. Since the beginning of time we have always been captivated and mesmerized by fire. A fireplace is typically the main focal point of a home's family/living area and has a mystical power to bring people together. Roasting marshmallows by camp fire or huddling around a fireplace hearth can easily be recreated right out your back door. The trend of incorporating an outdoor fireplace, fire pit or element of fire has become increasingly popular over the past five years. Wood, natural gas or propane can all be used to fuel your inferno based upon preference. These structures are available in kits for ease of installation or can be custom designed to fit specific needs. Natural stone, clay brick or manufactured block and veneer are all used in construction. Whether it be warmth, utility or

just plain beauty, fire has always proven to be a part of our lives in one form or another.

LED LANDSCAPE LIGHTING. LED technology in landscape lighting has come a long way since its inception. The initial cold, bluish LED lamps are now warm and inviting with the added option of and array of vibrant colors. WiFi driven transformers are capable of grouping light fixtures throughout separate outdoor spaces and adjusting light intensities as chosen through a phone or tablet. Presets can also be programmed into the smart device so lighting will automatically turn on or dim when it detects the device within that space. The ability to change colors on individual fixtures right from the palm of your hand I find the most versatile in creating the mood. The overall appearance of an outdoor space can be changed multiple times throughout the evening, captivating your audience and intriguing them to wonder what's next.

Outdoor living should be a seamless blend of architecture and landscape reflecting style and creature comforts from interior to the exterior of the home. It is the integration of elements as outdoor kitchens, fireplaces and roof structures which in all essence create additional rooms of relaxation and entertainment. Especially with our region having such drastic climate changes throughout the seasons it's essential to maximize use time with these features. In the near future I see homes being listed for sale not only with the interior square footage, but also with that of exterior spaces as well. **H&H**

Michael Pasquarello is a degreed landscape architect with Elite Landscaping. Email him at MPasquarello@EliteLandscaping.com or call (856) 753-1944. Visit EliteLandscaping.com for more information.

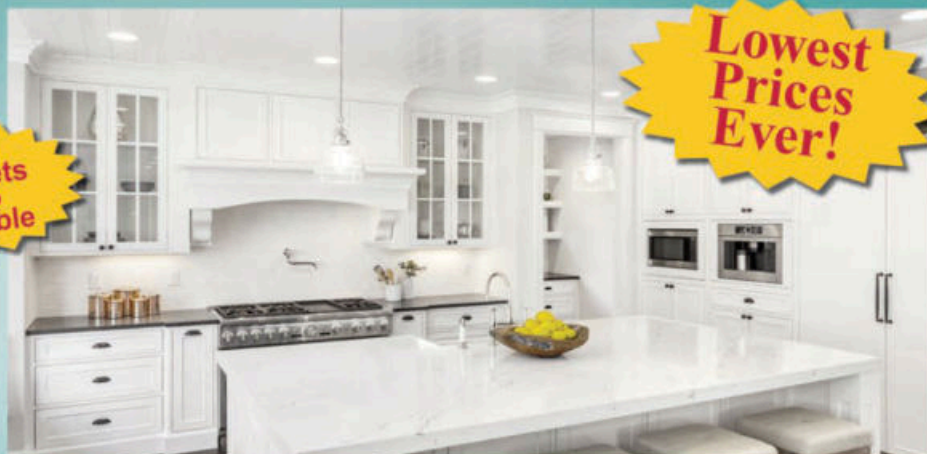


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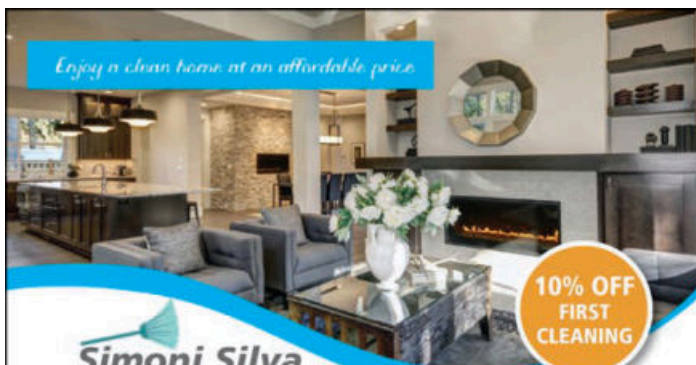
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You already know that adding a swimming pool to your backyard is going to take it to a whole new level of entertainment. You can imagine yourself not only swimming with friends and family but also relaxing poolside with a great book or dining al fresco on those warm summer nights. Even the idea of enjoying the view of your pool from inside of your home adds an element of excitement. But you may be wondering what you can do to make your pool even more spectacular. After all, you're not looking for a run-of-the-mill, cookie-cutter style pool. You want something unique.

The fact is, there are more options for your pool than ever before. Gone are the days when a pool was built in a standard rectangle with basic features. These days everything from the pool shape to the added features can be custom designed and built to your exact specifications.

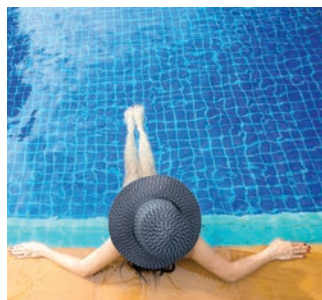




All the Features

Oftentimes, it's the added features that really make a pool spectacular. One way to take your luxury pool to the next level is to add a sundeck, says Don Panetta of D. Panetta Contracting. A sundeck (which has also gone by names like a "baja deck," "tanning ledge" or "sun shelf") is a custom feature that provides an area where you can be "in the pool" without being fully submerged. Some homeowners want this ledge created large enough to fit one or more lounge chairs, others are happy with just a small ledge where they can sit or have young children play while watching older children swim.

"You might also consider adding a custom-built grotto, which is a private cave area built behind a waterfall," Panetta



adds. "It's all up to a person's preference of what they want to add to make their home into a vacation resort."

Dominic DiCesare of Blue Haven Pools by Calvitti says that automation is another important luxury design option. Homeowners want the ease of being able to control their pool features at the push of a button. This includes not only the automated pool cover but also the fire and water features around

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"Homeowners might consider water features like fountains, jets, cascading waterfalls and more," says DiCesare. "There are so many features you can add to your pool; Anything you can dream."

Lighting is also important, says Mike McCool, general manager of Swim-Mor Pools. Not only the lighting within the pool but also around it. After all, you want your space to be highly functional, even after the sun goes down.

Many homeowners are opting for LED lighting that can be controlled from their smartphone. Everything from color-changing lighting to different lighting set-ups for different zones can really help take your

pool area to the next level, says McCool.

"Just keep in mind that the more features you add to your pool, the more complex the design becomes—and that takes time," adds McCool. "We complete 3D digital designs that help our customers see exactly what their pool is going to look like."

Vacation Inspiration

The backyard vacation trend—or "staycation"—is as hot a trend as ever, says McCool, adding that there is no doubt that many homeowners get their inspiration for pool ideas after visiting resorts in places like Mexico or the Caribbean.

Rich Cording Sr., owner and founder of CLC Landscape Design

agrees, adding that his company has designed and built some unique pools which were inspired by vacations. One pool that CLC recently constructed was meant to look like it was "floating" with infinity edges around all sides.

Of course, homeowners might also consider an infinity edge on just one end, too. This special feature (also sometimes referred to as a "vanishing edge" or a "zero edge") means water flows over the edge, creating a visual effect of water with no boundary. They're quite popular at high-end resorts.

"We've also designed and built a pool shaped like a horse's head and another like a guitar," Cording says. "You can get really creative with a custom design. Another feature from a resort that homeowners like is a swim-up bar with stools where they can share a drink with friends or family."

In addition, adding



“*Homeowners today want ... an outdoor space that is going to keep them outside all weekend so that they can enjoy time with their friends and family to the fullest.”*

— Rich Cording Sr., CLC Landscape Design

Image courtesy of CLC Landscape Design



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Image courtesy of D. Panetta Contracting, LLC

gas-powered fire torches or urns around the pool can really take it to that resort-like level, DiCesare adds. It creates a sense of ambiance and wow factor that you wouldn't get with an ordinary pool.

The Total Package

While the pool will surely be the showpiece of your outdoor design, it's not just the immediate pool area that matters. Today's homeowners are looking for the total

package. That means they want an outdoor space that has all of the amenities.

"It's the complete space," DiCesare says. "Homeowners don't just want the pool itself—they want all the surrounding amenities that makes the space even more enjoyable."

This includes add-ons like an outdoor kitchen, pool house or pavilion. Homeowners might also want game areas such as a putting green or a spot to play horseshoes

or quoits. DiCesare says that today's homeowners are looking to get as much use out of their backyards as possible.

Cording agrees, adding: "Homeowners today want it all. They want an outdoor space that is going to keep them outside all weekend so that they can enjoy time with their friends and family to the fullest. It's not really about the space itself as it is the memories that are made there." **H&H**



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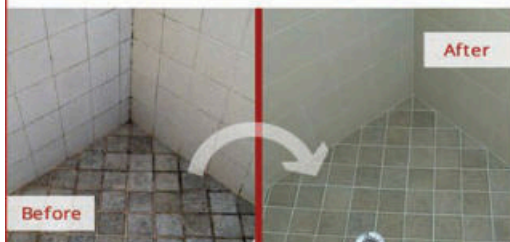
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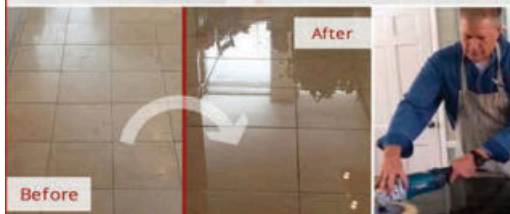
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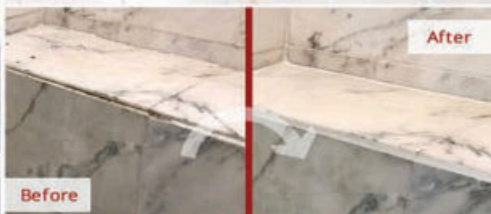
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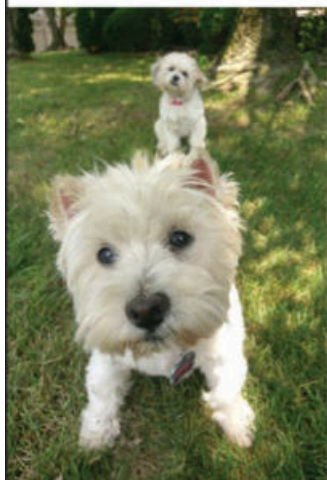
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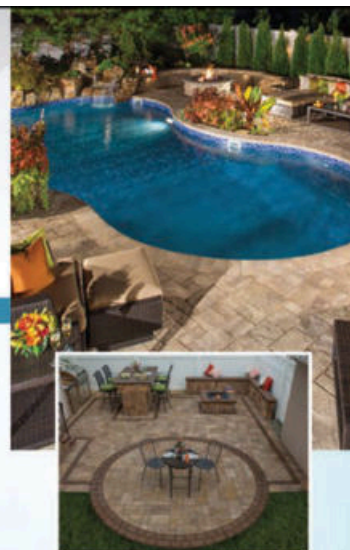
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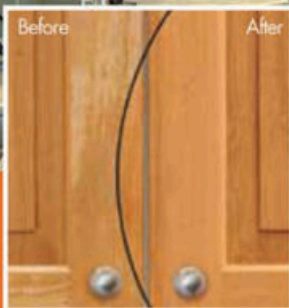
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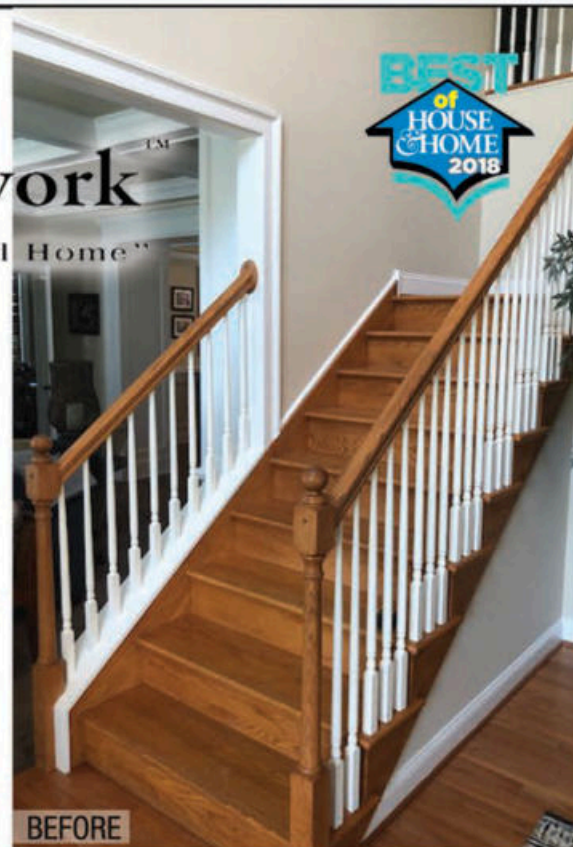
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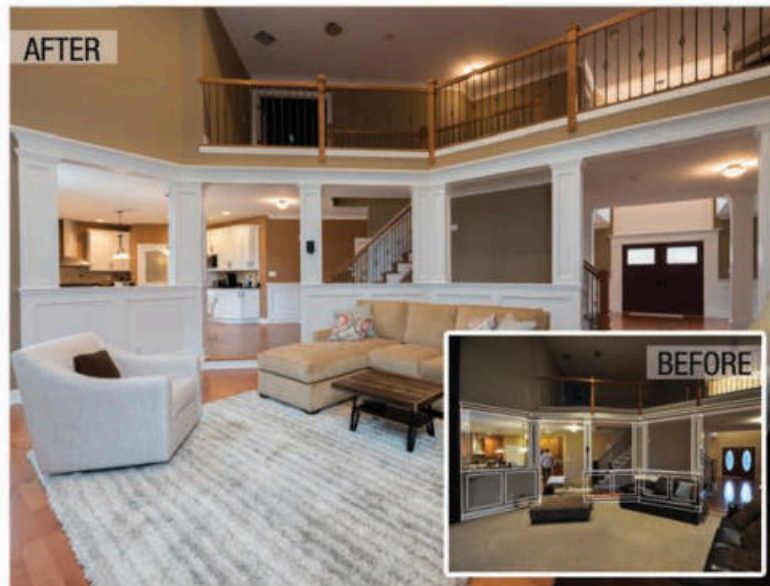
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