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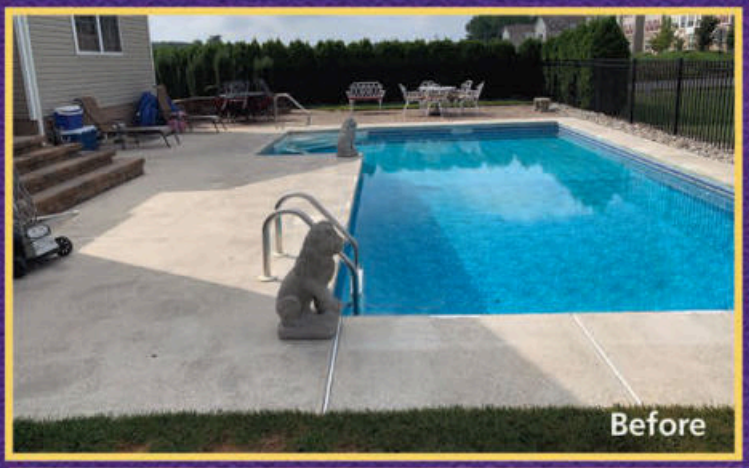
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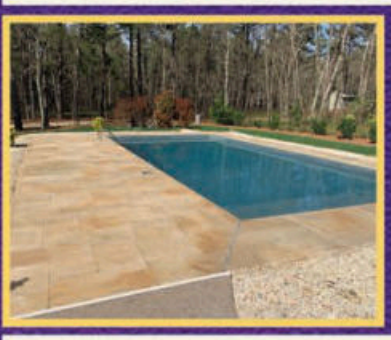
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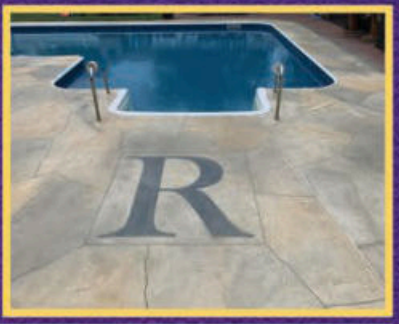
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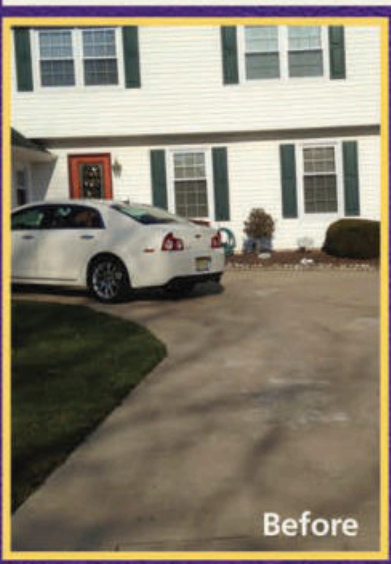
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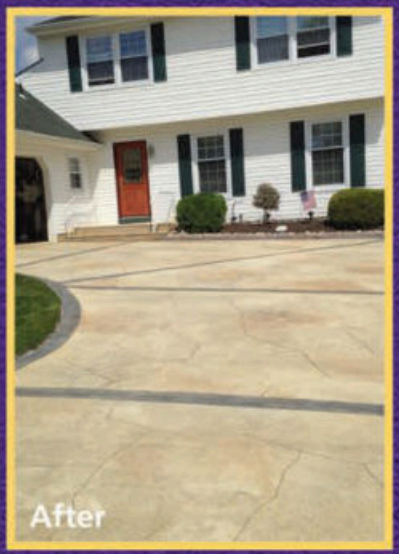






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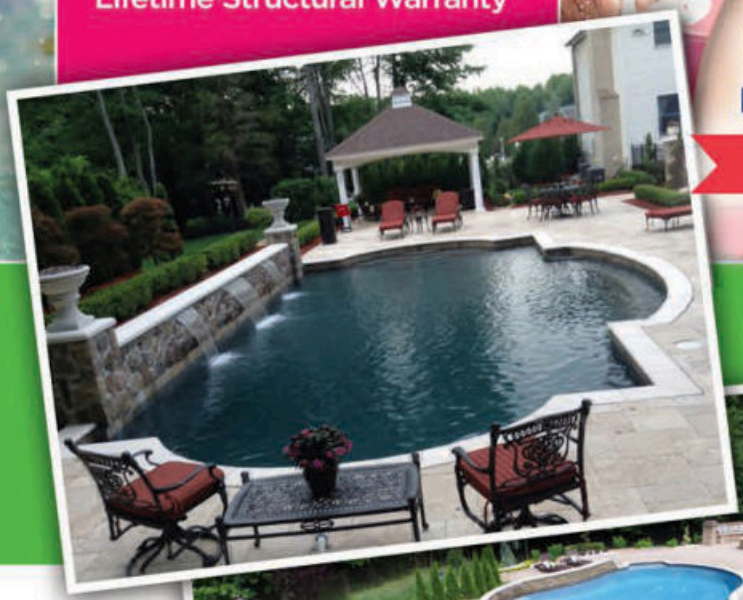
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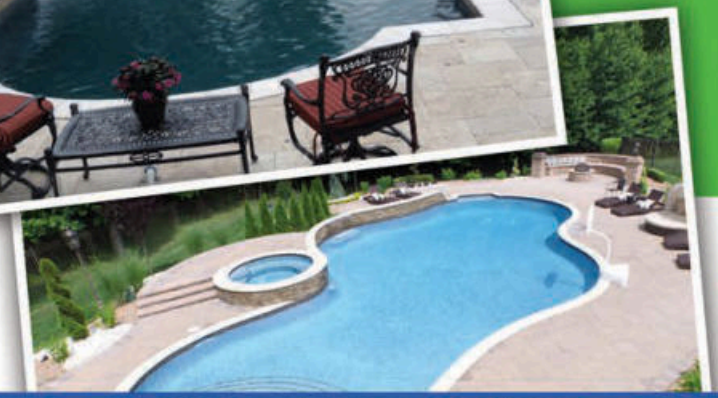
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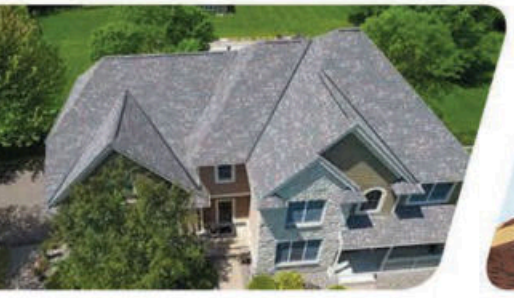
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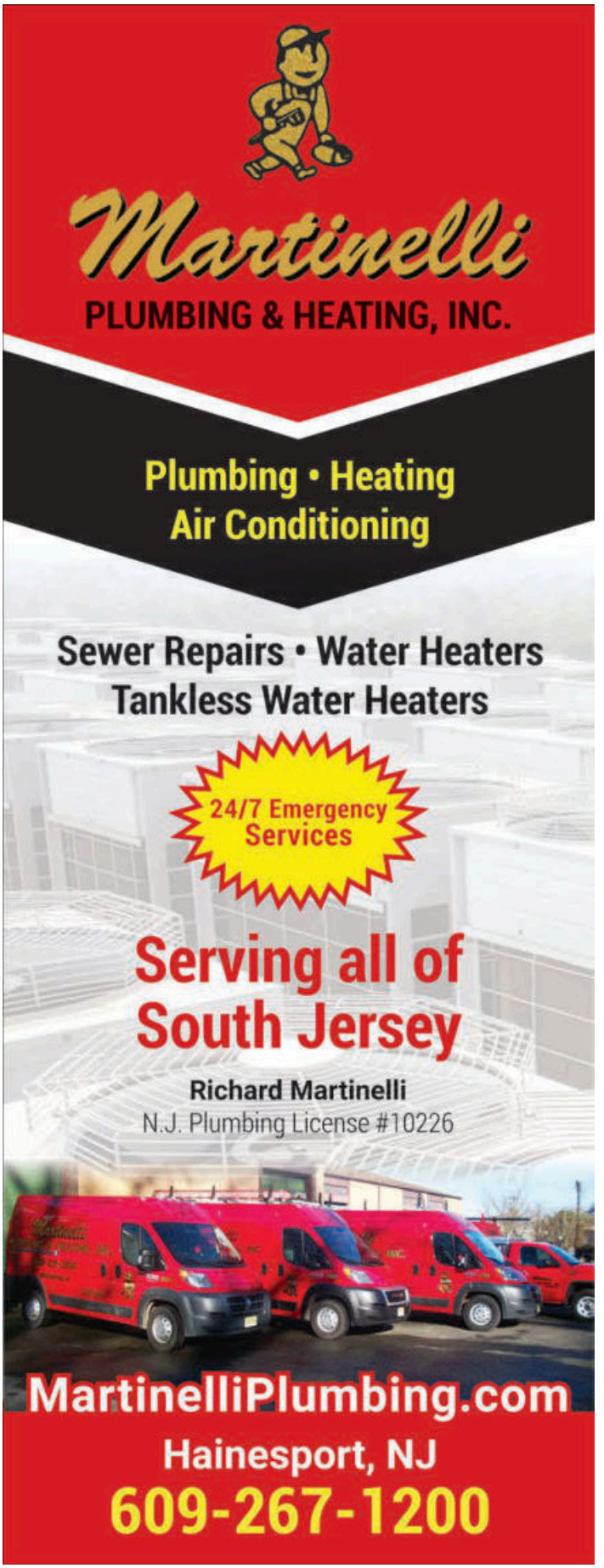
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SUMMER MAY BE OVER, BUT LANDSCAPING EXPERTS SAY THERE IS STILL PLENTY

By Matt Cosentino

EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD HAS THOSE RESIDENTS WITH A GREEN THUMB WHO TRULY ENJOY THE PROCESS OF WORKING ON THEIR PROPERTIES AND CREATING A PICTURE-PERFECT LANDSCAPE, AND THEIR YARDS DESERVEDLY RECEIVE COMPLIMENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

Others see it as a chore they must tackle every weekend, but nevertheless recognize that a little effort will go a long way toward boosting curb appeal.

No matter which camp you belong to, know this: The arrival of Labor Day does not mean it is time to lock away your lawn mower and gardening tools for the year just yet. Spring may be the season that the average homeowner most associates with landscaping, but fall is actually a crucial period when it comes to lawn renovations, plantings and maintenance.

"Fall is the time of the year where a property should be evaluated to see what stresses negatively impacted turf and plantings throughout the spring and more likely the summer," says Michael Pasquarello, degreed landscape architect and vice president of Elite Landscaping. "Proper actions taken now will allow your plants and lawn to have a comfortable winter slumber, ready to explode in spring once the weather breaks."

House & Home spoke to several area experts to learn more about the important steps to take now to lead to a lush landscape next spring and summer.

Prime time for planting

There are a number of factors why fall is an ideal time for new plantings of all varieties, most notably the weather.

"Most people don't realize it but September and October are much better months than April or May, and studies at Rutgers and Cornell have both shown that," says Richard Cording Sr., registered landscape architect and owner of CLC Landscape Design. "The reason is that soil gets cooler, the roots grow deeper and because of the presence of dew virtually every morning and then sunny days and cooler nights, it's perfect growing weather for lawns, trees and shrubs to set their roots. Also, for new trees and shrubs, it's less stress going into the winter than it is going into a hot summer because they go dormant. If you plant a tree in May and then in June we get five 90-degree days in a row, the stress on that plant is way worse than sub-zero temperatures when the tree itself is dormant."

Chris DeMato, owner of Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing, adds that the cooler temperatures make transplanting plant material much easier than in the middle of July.

"You can plant at any time, however the biggest concern is transporting plant material from a garden center on a hot summer day," he says. "It burns the foliage in the travel. In the fall season, it's a bit cooler so you don't have to worry too much about that. Also, it's less work on the homeowner's part to water the plant material. So I think generally it's a great time to plant all plants.

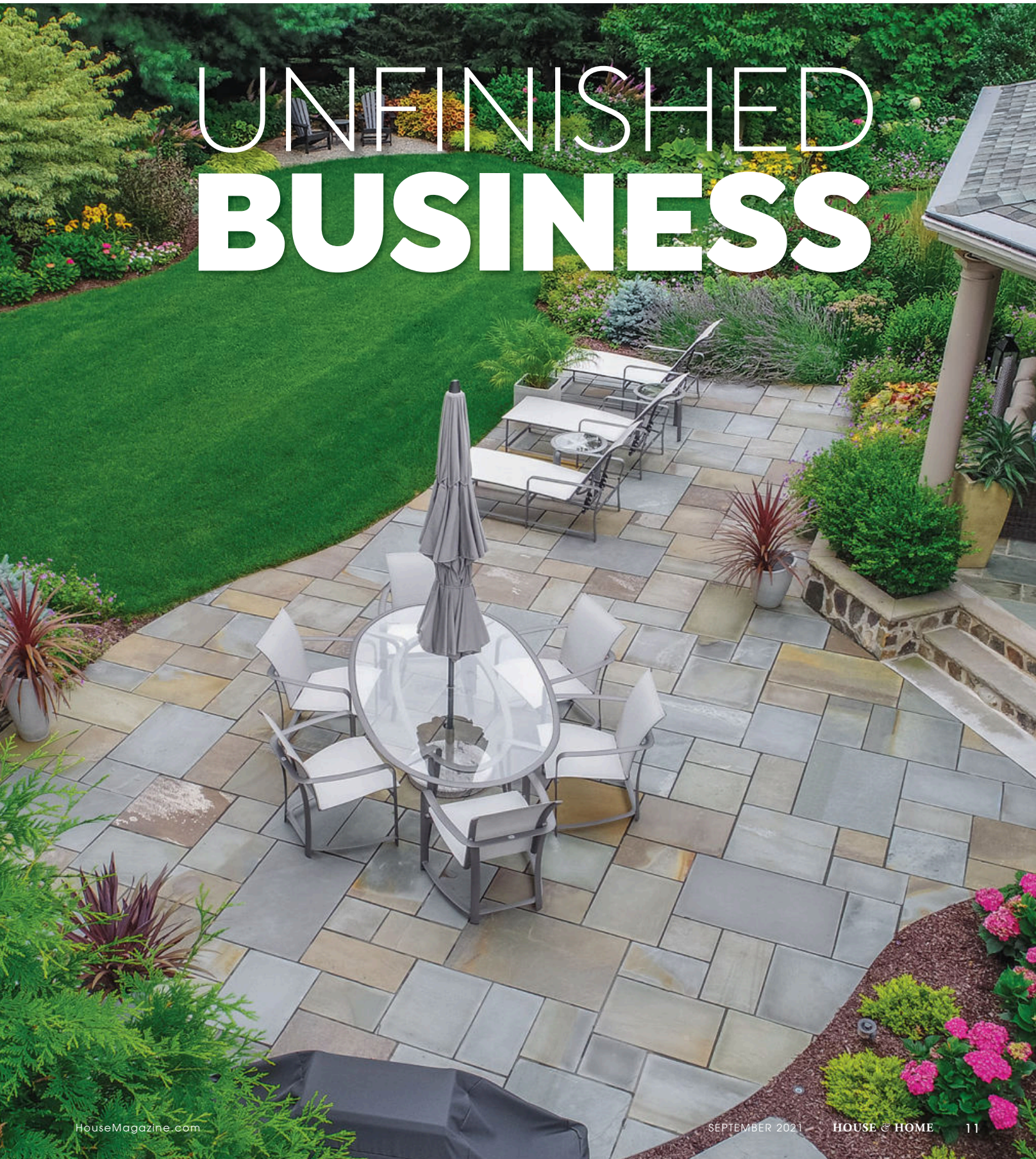




Image at right courtesy of CLC Landscape Design

OF WORK TO BE DONE TO YOUR YARD THIS FALL IN PREPARATION FOR THE SPRING.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS



Garden centers and nurseries are usually re-stocking in the late summer for another burst of business in the early fall, so you get some nice new plant material as well."

For those looking to add bulbs like tulips and daffodils to their flower beds, now is the time to do so, says Cording, so they can get into the ground before it freezes and have the winter to develop strong roots and begin the flowering process for spring. Sam Waddell, owner of SLS Landscaping, agrees and offers other helpful hints for a beautiful garden. "The avid gardener will also start planting chrysanthemum and aster that will offer that splash of color for the fall," he says. "A little bit later into the fall, winter pansies will make an appearance and provide color late in the season and another big push in the early spring."

Caring for the lawn

The hum of lawn mowers and weed wackers is usually part of the soundtrack of summer, but it is recommended to keep up with regular lawn maintenance in autumn as well. The weather will usually dictate when it is time to stop for the year.

"It's important to keep it regular and do not cut it short before the winter," Cording says. "When I was young my dad always had me cut it real short before the winter but that's the worst thing you can do because it robs the plant of all its nutrients, which are in the green part of the plant. So cut it at the same height through Thanksgiving."

He adds that renovations to the lawn during the fall produce the best results because of the weather and also less competition from weeds like dandelions and crabgrass. Experts suggest thatching, aerating and seeding be done in the early portion of the season.

"September through mid-October is ideal as temperatures are on the decline, creating a more favorable environment for cool weather turf varieties such as fescues to germinate," Pasquarello says. "Having this completed by mid-October also ensures the newly germinated lawn blades have sufficient time to mature and harden off prior to winter setting in."

"Lawns will benefit greatly from fall aeration with combined overseeding and an application of lime," adds Scott Nickett, owner of Nickett Landscaping. "This will break up the clay compacted soils and allow airflow down in the soil, allowing for better root growth for new and existing grass."

Leaf cleanup and other tips

Most homeowners realize the necessity of raking and collecting leaves during the fall, but some will try to get away with the task just once or twice. This could have a negative impact on the lawn.

"I think people tend to do one general cleanup and if the leaves continue to fall, they figure they can clean them in the spring," DeMato says. "That's not a great idea because leaves sitting on a lawn throughout the winter will kill the grass, so you want to make sure you do two or three cleanups throughout the fall season and one at the end. You want to keep as many leaves off the grass and around your plant material as possible. When it snows and rains and you have clumps of leaves around your lawn, you're going to see a lot of damage in the spring when everything melts and starts to grow again."



DeMato and Pasquarello both stress that this pertains to any hardscaping as well, because piles of leaves left on patios, for example, can lead to staining once winter weather sets in and the material starts to decay. Leaves in flower beds, however, might actually be beneficial in acting like a mulch, Cording explains. In fact, he is a big proponent of mulching in the fall, even though most people consider it a spring activity.

"You want to protect your plant roots over the winter from freezing and not having moisture, so a good shredded, hardwood bark mulch protects the roots of the plants over the winter and next year it will hold down weeds, and it also insulates it," he says. "Obviously, the ground is still going to freeze, but it keeps it at a more even temperature. Most shrubs in our area have what we call surface roots—they don't grow down real deep, they grow along the surface. So having mulch over the top protects them and helps tremendously. Mulch is one of the most underused tools that horticulturists have."

Some experts suggest that fall is too late to be pruning, but others say selective, careful clipping can be done.

"Fall is a good time to prune back and shape most specimens of evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubbery and perennials," says Diane Marrazzo, outdoor design specialist and co-owner of Marrazzo's North River. "Pruning too late into fall may leave an unsealed wound open, causing the tree to lose moisture through the winter, potentially leading to infection or demise come spring. Deciduous trees can often be pruned well into winter without any consequence come spring. Preparing your landscape for winter also preps it for new growth come spring."

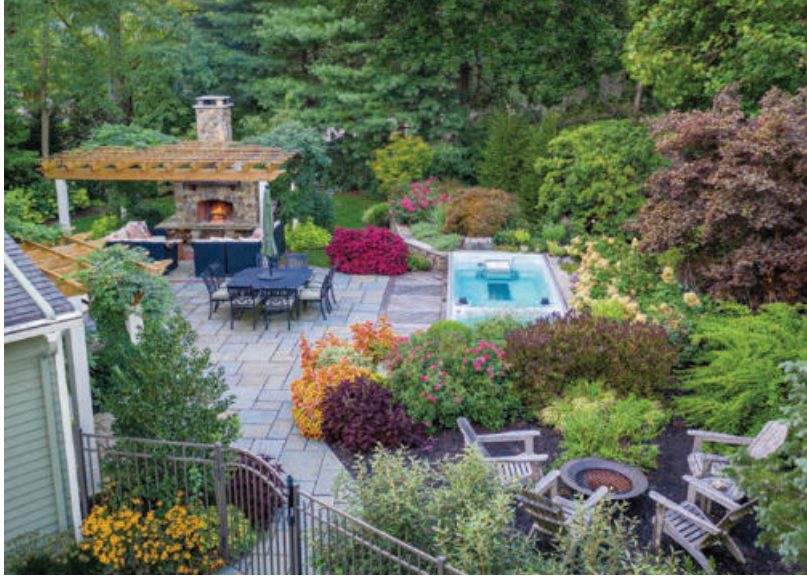
Rose bushes are another example of a specimen that can be pruned, and some people will cut back ornamental grasses.

"All perennials should be cut back once the first couple frosts set in and cause the surface vegetation to die back," Pasquarello says. "I actually leave my ornamental grasses up all winter long as the light tan blades and seed heads still are an added interest. Fall is also a great time for corrective pruning as once the leaves fall off the plants it makes it much easier to see the branching structure and evaluate."

Beginning or planning new projects

Autumn's temperatures also make it perfect for adding hardscaping elements and crews will often stay busy through the end of the year.

"The ground gets a bit harder as the cool weather sets in so it's a little easier to do outdoor projects such as patios," DeMato says. "The diggings and excavating is not as messy during the fall season. We do outdoor projects until the ground freezes, which can be as late as mid-January. As far as materials go, you tend to get a little



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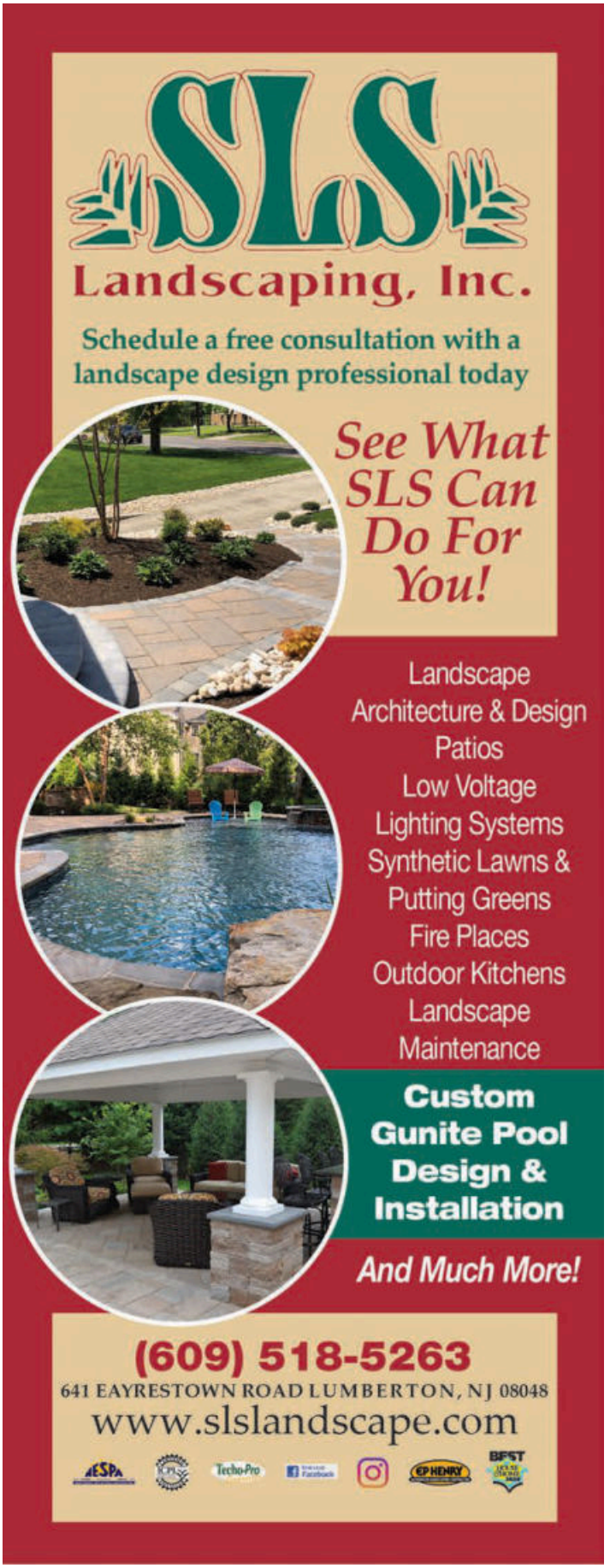
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bit better prices in the fall season. The garden centers, brick suppliers and fence suppliers tend to discount materials they may want to push out the door before the end of the season."

As homeowners assess their properties following the summer, Nickett points to a number of different projects that can be completed before next season.

"All projects can still be planned in the fall," he says. "We are still booking new plant designs as well as plant renovations, and new hardscape projects like walls, walkways and patios are still being installed before winter. One of our biggest projects that is booked in the fall is lawn drainage remediation. With the decrease in temperatures and less daytime sunlight, the lawns stay wetter for longer. Fixing lawn drainage will result in a useable lawn, better lawn growth, no water in the home/basement and cleaner dog paws."

Even if the actual construction is not being done now, it never hurts to begin the design phase and the process of acquiring any necessary permits from the municipality or homeowner's association. Getting on the landscaping company's schedule before it fills up in early spring is another bonus.

"Spring projects seem to be at a distance, however, with the shortage of materials, pavers, natural quarry stones and lumber [along with] booked schedules, now is the time to consider scheduling with your landscape contractor or building contractor for your desired spring needs," says Marrazzo, who emphasizes that a key element for outdoor projects is coverage. "I always say, shade is a commodity—please plant a shade tree. Dedicate the tree planting for a loved one and commit to the care of that tree for years to come. Or plan for the on-site construction of a pavilion for your outdoor space."

In the end, planning ahead in the fall with an experienced professional can pay major dividends when the warmer weather returns and homeowners want to enjoy their outdoor space.

"We're licensed landscape architects and we have a saying: 'Great landscapes start with great ideas,'" Cording says. "If you want these beautiful landscapes that you see on Instagram and in magazines, it comes with planning and coming up with great ideas. We have several architects who work on every plan to come up with a synthesis of ideas, because we feel that's better than just one person's ideas. Then we obviously follow the town's guidelines for setbacks and lot coverage, etc. Sometimes it takes months and months to do the design and get the permits. If somebody is looking to do a project that requires permitting or designing, you can't start that in the spring—you've got to start now." H&H

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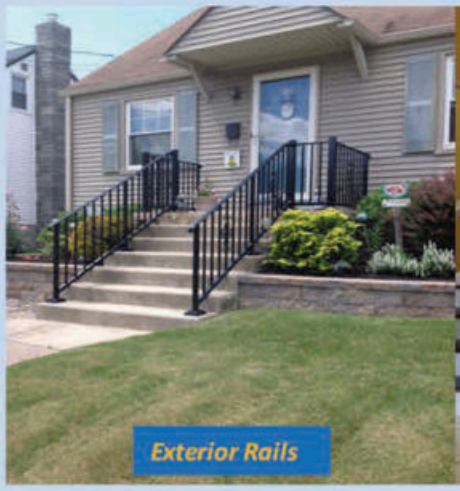
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Leading With Ethics

East Coast Roofing, Siding & Windows has built its four-decade reputation on a foundation of always putting people before profit.

by **Madeleine Maccar**





WHEN EAST COAST ROOFING, SIDING & WINDOWS' OWNER LARRY STITELER, A SECOND-GENERATION ROOFER, ESTABLISHED THE COMPANY IN 1979, HE DID IT WITH A POCKETFUL OF CHANGE AND A PRAYER.

As Stiteler prepares to pass the ever-growing, family-owned company to his son Shawn, a lot has changed since its early days. But one thing remained constant for more than 40 years: East Coast is determined to make a difference in its community, whether that's South Jersey or the greater global neighborhood.

That ethics- and morality-driven mentality was the deciding factor for President Jeff Kay when he joined the team in 2016.

"The vision of the company is to make a worldwide difference, and that's why I came onboard," Kay says. "We fulfill that mission through leadership development, faith-based initiatives, community service and strategic planning. The core values are integrity, fun, trust, servant leadership and personal development."

At East Coast, every house is more than a shelter and "every employee is focused on the customer experience." They treat every job with the same respect they'd show their own homes and each client like family.

"We explain to new employees that Larry expects every homeowner to be treated as if they're his mother," explains Kay. "We hold our people accountable to that."

So, what does being guided by ethics look like in practice? It starts with the first meeting between prospective clients and the exterior consultants, includes a thorough home inspection and a discussion of all the available options—including options that would send a homeowner to another company because it's outside East Coast's wheelhouse.

Each homeowner is not mailed an estimate, but is provided a detailed proposal with an exact price before the consultant leaves the home. That's the bill a client pays, and not a cent more.

"There's plenty of work out there for everyone," says Kay. "We're not going into someone's home to hard-sell our services for five hours until they say yes. If we can help you, that's great but if we can't, that's OK, too."

East Coast believes everyone should have a sturdy roof above them and endeavors to make that a reality for everyone. A strong partnership with GreenSky, one of the largest lenders in the construction space, has considerably simplified the process for clients of all budgets.

"We discuss the process of financing your project, if you want to put any money down, how much you can afford a month," Kay says. "We'll go on GreenSky's mobile app, it takes three minutes for the homeowner to apply and usually in 60 to 90 seconds after we hit 'submit,' we know if they're approved. If they are, that's when the process starts: We sign you up, we get you on the schedule and your project moves ahead."

Kay notes that GreenSky most benefits people who were caught off-guard by emergency home repairs, and those whose projects were bigger than they initially planned for and require additional time and labor.

Beyond the work it does protecting area families and their homes, East Coast spearheads a number of ongoing charity initiatives.

"During the holidays, we give away two free roofs to people who've given back to the community but are currently facing true hardships," says Kay, adding that recipients are generally first responders and are selected once the East Coast staff has read every single one of the almost 50 nominations they receive annually.

"In the very beginning of December, we go out and surprise these folks. It's a big community event. We show up with a parade of people, usually all the police officers and firefighters in the town are involved."

Other efforts emphasize just how far-reaching East Coast's sense of community really is. In addition to being the sole sponsor of a few feeding centers built in Guatemala by the nonprofit MANNA Worldwide, which fights childhood poverty and hunger internationally, they've also put their own construction skills to use for a greater global good.

"For a few years now, Larry's been building a dentistry project in Guatemala because dental care is such an issue there," Kay notes. "He's gotten a lot of donations, he's opened a couple facilities, he's got dentists from the United States who come down there."

It all goes back to that faith-based resolve to always lend a hand to those in need.

"In Larry's words, when he dies, the Lord is not going to congratulate him on how many roofs he took care of—it's about how many people he helped, and that's what our team is here for, to facilitate making a difference worldwide," says Kay. "Our reputation is that people hire us because we stand behind everything we do and we're going to be here for you 10 years, 20 years, 40 years later because we strive to be a model corporate citizen." H&H

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ask the expert
by Madeleine Maccar

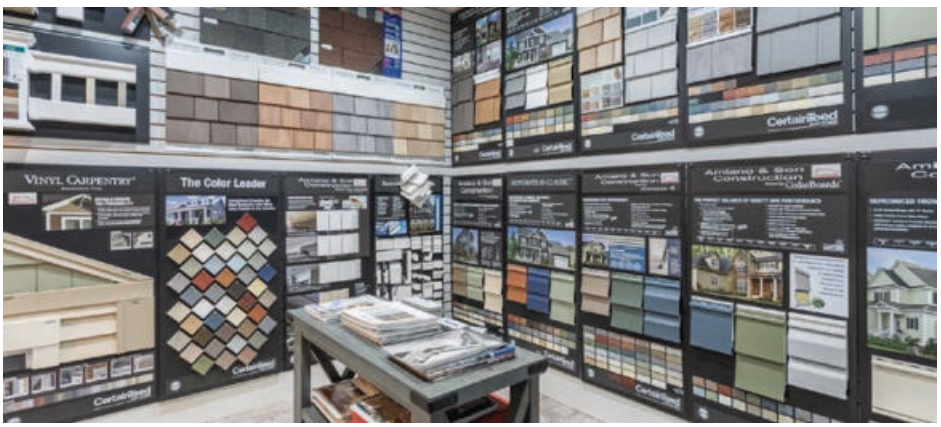
Amiano & Son Design-Build

ANYONE WHO'S REMODELED THEIR HOME, NO MATTER THE SCALE OF THE PROJECT, KNOWS THAT IT IS A MASSIVE UNDERTAKING FROM BEGINNING TO END. Even before the work commences, a homeowner needs to select the flooring, tiles, cabinetry, plumbing fixtures and more that will make their newly redesigned spaces feel even more like home.

A one-stop shop that brings together designers and builders, kitchen and bath options, and a sprawling showroom can make the whole process not only less stressful but also downright enjoyable. Enter Amiano & Son Design-Build, a full-service design and remodeling firm that has it all under one roof. Since 1968, the South Jersey team has been working with the region's homeowners to bring their visions to life. It currently has two locations, with a 3,500-square-foot building in Southampton being home to the showroom that allows clients to examine, compare and literally get their hands on the elements they want to bring together in their home.

House & Home spoke with Vice President Wendy Amiano about the benefits of working with her company and how it leads to better outcomes for customers.







Wendy Amiano, vice president of Amiano & Son

HOW DOES WORKING WITH A SHOWROOM REMODELER HELP REDUCE STRESS ON A HOMEOWNER WHO IS TACKLING A REMODELING PROJECT?

There's a stress-reduction factor when working with a showroom remodeler because you're able to be in one single location and work with one familiar person throughout your entire design process. You're not getting a lot of hands in the pot because you're working with one designer.

When you're working with a remodeler who doesn't have a showroom … you'll go to pick out your cabinets at one location. Then they're going to send you to another place to pick out your tile, and hopefully you have a sample of your cabinet door that you can hold up to the tile, or you're trying to match it to photos of your backsplash that might not be in the right lighting. Our design team comes out to your house to take a look at the job on multiple occasions, and they also come out with a field member if there are questions on how a certain product could work in the remodel or how it will fit. Our designers work with our production teams.

DOES THE SHOWROOM ATMOSPHERE HELP CUSTOMERS DISCOVER PRODUCTS AND STYLES THEY DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT?

Many clients walk in already certain of what they want, but plenty more only know that it's time for something new. When they come into the showroom, we have TVs that are running with past jobs and we can pull up jobs that we've done as examples.

The showroom is well-stocked with plenty of inspiration, ideas and items. You'll find different cabinetry lines and all kinds of fixtures, flooring, tile, tubs, toilets, glass samples for things like shower doors, countertop samples, sinks galore and edge samples for a truly custom room design. We also have software to render prospective renovations in a 3D "live mood board," which helps demonstrate how an array of colors, finishes and materials look in different lighting, from different angles and in a more realistic illustration than a 2D design.

WHAT IS THE NET BENEFIT ON HOMEOWNERS AND THEIR PROJECT WHEN WORKING WITH AMIANO & SON?

All these time-saving services contribute to the convenience, expertise, proven track record and peace of mind that accompany working with a one-stop shop. At the end of the day, is not traveling all over the tri-state area to look at all different products worth it for you? Do you want to run around and be your own middleman while you're trying to make all of these decisions about the new kitchen you're going to spend a lot of time in with an untrained eye? Or would you rather have that trained eye, who was also then coordinating with the actual field or production or construction team of your project?

We have a lot of repeat business because they enjoyed the experience so much. They're able to peruse at their leisure and not worry about rushing off to somewhere else. We're giving them that convenience, and the feedback we get is tremendous. H&H

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H&H profile by Lindsey Getz

Elegance with Endless Possibilities



CABINET DESIGN CENTER HAS A VAST ARRAY OF OPTIONS—BUT WITH EXPERT GUIDANCE, HOMEOWNERS GET THE HELP THEY NEED.


Joe Sananes, owner

As exciting as designing and building a new kitchen or bathroom can be, when you don't have the proper guidance or help, it can become overwhelming. With so many different choices to make, what is supposed to be a fun time can turn into something stressful.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

When homeowners—and/or their contractors—come into the Cabinet Design Center, a stunning kitchen and bath showroom in Voorhees, they find a vast array of materials and design choices. But they are also met with the guidance they need. Whether homeowners need design services or just some advice and guidance, the experts at the showroom are eager to help.

The showroom is the brainchild of Joe Sananes and his wife, Yafit, award-winning kitchen and bath design specialists who have been operating their design/build business, Creative Remodeling & Design, in Cherry Hill since 2005. They knew firsthand that what the market was missing was a state-of-the-art, walk-in showroom that could provide a visual experience for clients who want to be able to see and touch materials before making their choice.



Now, Cabinet Design Center not only serves their own design/build clients but other contractors, designers and homeowners, as well.

"If someone is looking for a one-stop shop, we can definitely be that for them," Joe explains. "But we can also just handle the design and supply side of a project."

One of the huge benefits of coming to Cabinet Design Center is that visitors will see such a multitude of choices—not only for different styles but also varying budgets. There is a wide variety of cabinetry from medium grade all the way up to premium lines. Still, Joe is quick to point out that even the mid-level price point cabinetry is still many steps above builder's grade or what you'd see in a big box store.

Plus, the overall experience isn't even comparable. Anyone who has walked into a big box store, or maybe even another design center, and hasn't gotten the help they really needed, knows how frustrating it can be. But Cabinet Design Center has an in-house Certified Kitchen and Bath Designer who is incredibly knowledgeable and experienced—and available to answer questions and provide guidance in the process.

"The fact that we also have extensive construction experience gives us the ability to help guide people toward the best materials that we know will work in the space they have," Joe adds. "We always first listen to what the customer wants but then we make our recommendations based on our knowledge and experience."

The truth is many colors or materials might not work together—and the last thing you want is to be disappointed after they're installed. But with a trusted guide leading you in the process, you'll make wise choices at every step.

Oftentimes, homeowners are also worried about ending up with something cookie-cutter or that looks like every other kitchen or bath out there. But Joe says that they are starting each and every project with a custom approach.

Cabinet Design Center

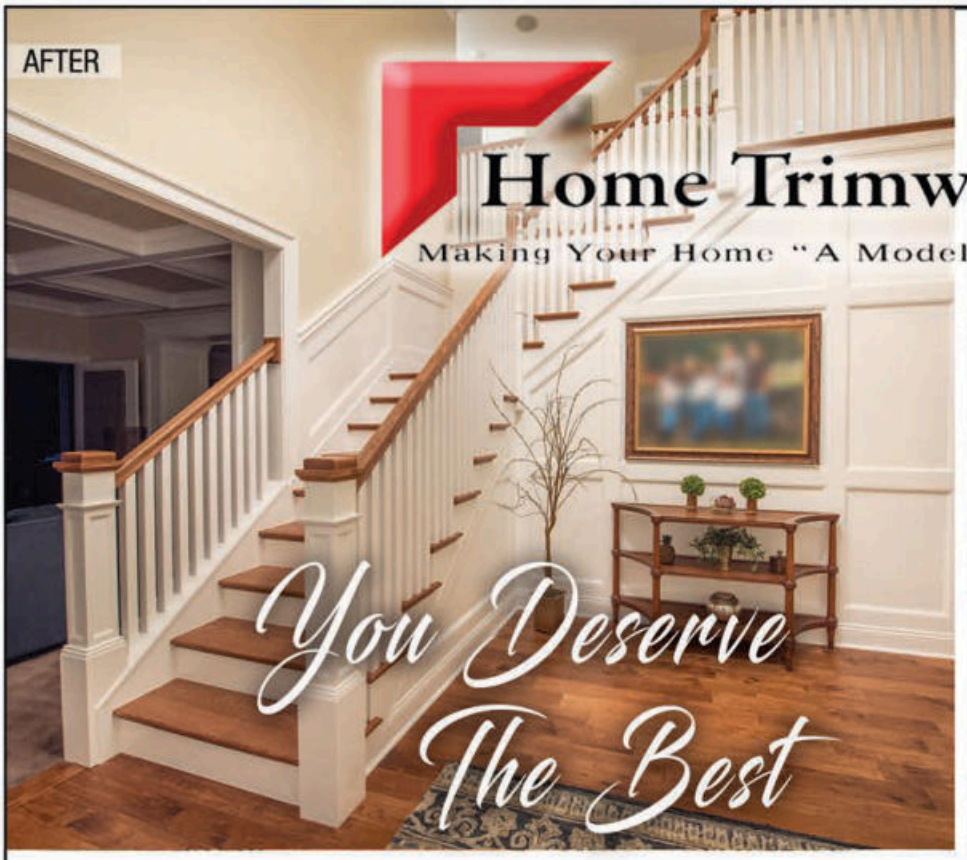
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"There is a high level of creativity, and we are always thinking outside of the box," Yafit says. "Where my husband really shines is his eye for design. He can see a space and know exactly how to make the best use of it. He brings together these beautiful spaces with just the right materials to create something the homeowner truly loves."

Cabinet Design Center clients will also get access to an industry-specific software management program that provides high-level communication to keep them in the loop. The project manager, in-house designer and scheduling are all linked so that everyone is up to date on what's happening and where things stand. This has been a differentiator when it comes to keeping clients informed.

"Homeowners get access to a portal where they can make material selections, communicate and keep up with the project status," Yafit adds. "Oftentimes people are used to being handed spreadsheets or paperwork from their contractor, so this is impressive and a lot more helpful."

In the end, Joe and Yafit say that much of the positive experience at the showroom boils down to peace of mind. A new kitchen or bath is a huge undertaking. But when clients choose Cabinet Design Center, they know they're in excellent hands. H&H



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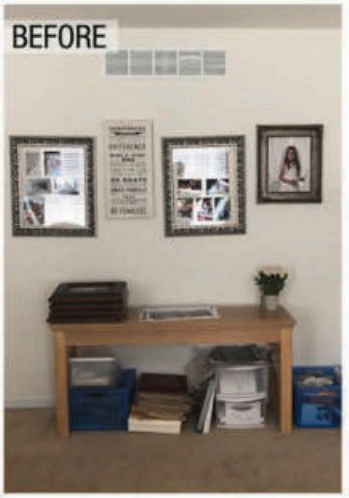


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LARRY LANDWHER OF GRAND VIEW ROOFING & EXTERIORS CAUTIONS AGAINST NEGLECTING YOUR HOME'S BEST PROTECTIONS AGAINST THE ELEMENTS. *by* **Madeleine Maccar**

The Roof Over Your Head



There is one prevailing truth to maintaining a house that Larry Landwher of Grand View Roofing & Exteriors thinks all homeowners should know.

"Not all roofs are created equal," he says.

The age, materials, quality, regional location and other variables factoring into the longevity of a roof can all affect the efficiency, durability and life span of a house's topmost feature—and its first line of defense.

While Grand View is in its third year of operation, the team behind the family-owned company has been providing professional construction services to clients all around New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania for more than 16 years; Landwher himself has been in construction since he was 15.

Working with both residential and commercial customers, they've won a loyal client base by providing superior work and craftsmanship with a focus on not just roofing but also siding, windows and gutters.

It's not just understanding how one part of a structure can affect the rest that sets Grand View apart. It's also how the team treats every customer like family and approaches every home like their own.

"I feel like we make the job more personal: You're dealing with a few people instead of a lot of different people, a lot of salesmen, a lot of project managers," he says. "Plus, when you're dealing directly with contractors such as myself, you're talking directly to the person who's hands-on with the exterior remodeling and can ask them specific questions, instead of talking through someone else."

That personal approach extends to not only working with clients but also educating them on proactive homeownership, as letting exterior work languish can lead to more dire and expensive damage later.

Landwher's noticed that most homeowners don't think about their roofs until something goes wrong. And since that roof takes the brunt of the beating from rain, snow, ice, wind, falling debris and year-round sun, it's a risky element to neglect.

"As far as the house goes, if your roof goes bad, you can run into some serious problems," he warns. "You can wind up with damage to the inside of the home."

That's why he recommends getting your roof professionally assessed, especially if it's been 20 years or more since its materials have been replaced.

"I've seen a lot of people who say, 'My roof's 25 years old but it's not leaking right now, so I don't need to get it replaced.' But as shingles start to weather and age, it can de-laminate the plywood underneath and cause plywood issues. And then instead of replacing your roof, you're now replacing all your plywood, which can double the cost."

Although, Landwher notes, not all professional quotes are created equal, either, and he advises any homeowner who's looking to begin a roof restoration, reshingling or replacement to remember that settling for the lowest bidder can be tempting, but you get what you pay for.

"Sometimes I'm the second or the third estimate that walks in the door and a customer says, 'Hey, I got another contractor to do it for $1,000 cheaper,'" he says. "Then I'll look at the quote, and they're not using ice and water shield—they're using a builder's-grade shingle, where I'll try to show them why that one might be cheaper, and the differences between it and the one that's more expensive."

The upfront cost of high-quality materials may seem deceptively more expensive at the beginning of a project. But choosing better materials often means they're longer-lasting, and improves curb appeal, resale value and even energy efficiency.

"A lot of times, especially with older roofs, they don't have a ridge vent cut in so they're not getting adequate ventilation," Landwher explains. "We'll come in and we'll add that vent to allow proper ventilation in the attic space, which allows the home to cool better."

Early spring and fall tend to be Grand View's busiest seasons—installing a roof in the winter is dicey since shingles don't bond as well in the cold—which means now is the time to start getting ahead of roofing problems before the luxury of time is no longer an option.

And with the pandemic's supply shortage still impacting contractors, Landwher saw far too many clients get burned by pushing off repairs last year, only to face today's steep price hikes born of limited materials. It's one more reason why he advises homeowners to be proactive in maintaining their roofs.

"We just had our seventh price increase in about the last 13, 14 months," he says. "It's tough when you go out to a customer's house and they're in need of a roof, and they're saying, 'Hey, I'm going to wait 'til next year,' but they could have saved themselves a significant amount of money if they would have replaced the roof last year." H&H

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ask the expert
by Matt Cosentino

Sawyer Realty Group

EVEN DURING NORMAL TIMES, THE PROCESS OF BUYING OR SELLING A HOUSE CAN BE A NERVE-WRACKING ONE, AND THAT FEELING HAS ONLY BEEN MAGNIFIED WITH THE UNCERTAINTIES OF THE PANDEMIC. Residents of South Jersey have many skilled real estate professionals to lean on to help them navigate the waters, but few have the kind of diverse background that Beth Sawyer brings to the table.

In the 26 years since she first entered the field, Sawyer has had a hand in all facets of the industry, working extensively in new construction, designing, house flipping, and both residential and commercial sales/rentals. She also has more than a decade of experience in the mortgage business, giving her insight into the loan process, along with countless contacts in various aspects of home improvement.

It was Sawyer's goal to channel all of this knowledge into a better experience for buyers and sellers when she started her own firm, Sawyer Realty Group, in 2019. She spoke with *House & Home* about the unique talents her company offers and the current state of the market.


Beth Whisner-Sawyer, owner and broker

DO YOU THINK YOUR BACKGROUND MAKES YOU STAND APART FROM OTHER REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONALS?

Absolutely. I've done pretty much everything when it comes to real estate, and a lot of my business comes from referrals because of that. For example, if you need something fixed in your home, I'm going to get it fixed with honest contractors at a fair price and good quality. Even if I'm representing the buyer and we do a home inspection and there are some problems, I can help with repairs. The other agent and I want to do what's best for our clients, but we also want to get them to the table. I can do all the heavy lifting so we can get to the finish line.

THE MARKET HAS BEEN HOT FOR MUCH OF THE PANDEMIC AND SLOWED DOWN A BIT THIS SUMMER. WHERE DO YOU SEE IT GOING?

This summer, almost everyone I know took a vacation so the market slowed down. Also, buyers were tired of looking at a hundred properties, putting in 30 offers way over the asking price and not getting accepted because there was very little inventory and lots of competition. I think in the fall there's going to be a lot more inventory coming on the market and there's still a backlog of qualified buyers. Rates came down again, so I think the fall is going to be busier than it was last year at this time.

DO YOU RECOMMEND LISTING A HOME RIGHT NOW?

Some people may not be able to afford their homes because of the shutdowns, and fortunately they will get more for their houses now than they ever will. Homeowners should have equity in their homes. Instead of getting behind on the mortgage, get your home on the market and sell it. Even if you have to live with parents for a year or rent, don't ruin your credit. Grab the equity, save it and sit until the market calms down, and then buy something you can afford.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR BUYERS IN A COMPETITIVE MARKET?

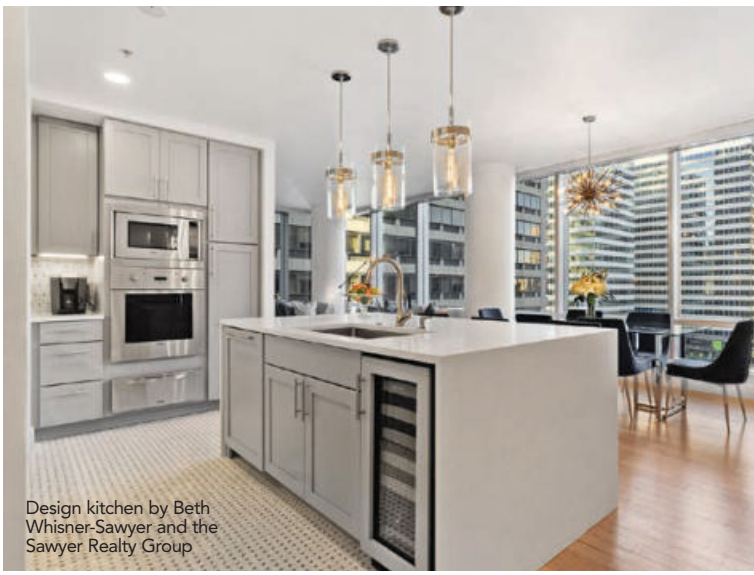
There is a big pool of buyers all fighting for the same amount of inventory. Buyers are waiving home inspections but I tell my clients not to do that. Buyers need to make sure there's nothing wrong with the house. If they do not, they may move into the home and find out down the line it needs significant repairs that will be costly. Buyers need to do their due diligence so they know what they're getting themselves into.

WHAT KIND OF TRAITS DO YOU LOOK FOR WHEN HIRING YOUR TEAM?

One is drive, two is loyalty and three is that they know the business. I'm looking for associates who want to listen and learn and will always do the right thing. It's more about the ethics and a good, positive team attitude. I don't believe in competition inside my boutique brokerage; we all work together as a team.

WHAT ELSE MAKES YOUR COMPANY DIFFERENT?

It's a family business. My son is licensed in New Jersey and in California and my daughter just finished real estate school. She is getting ready to acquire her license. It's a small, boutique-style firm that allows us to be hands on with customer service when working with clients. At other brokerages, you probably don't see team leaders/owners until closing. I'm showing houses and helping my clients every step of the way. I'm also teaching and explaining to them why they have to do certain things. It's a learning process for clients and they appreciate that. They know I have their back and it helps them sleep better. This business is not easy; when you do the kind of volume I do, you're always running into problems. With that being said, I am a problem-solver. We get the problems fixed and keep moving forward, which definitely makes life easier. H&H


Design kitchen by Beth Whisner-Sawyer and the Sawyer Realty Group



An Energy-Efficient Exterior

Is your home ready for the winter ahead?

by **Lindsey Getz**

With colder months just on the horizon, now is a great time to start thinking about energy-efficient upgrades to your home's exterior. When you make these changes, you not only help reduce energy loss (which equates to dollars back in your pocket), but you also do your part in reducing your environmental impact.

"The main culprits of energy loss are through the attic space since heat rises—but also through inefficient windows and doors," says Adam Parnes of Global Home Improvement. "The first step for an energy-efficient home is to make sure your attic is properly insulated and then tackle windows and doors. In addition, to lower energy bills, new thermal windows can really change the comfort level of a room. We recommend replacing the windows in rooms most often used such as bedrooms or family rooms."

Wayne Liss, owner of New Look Builders, Inc., agrees that attic space is a major source of energy loss. It can also happen around poorly insulated walls, poorly sealed windows and doors, leaky roofs and poorly maintained HVAC systems and appliances.

"With winter just around the corner, it would serve homeowners well to replace poorly insulated windows and doors now," he says. "Look into replacing your roof if it is more than 20 years old and leaking. Also look into adding sufficient insulation to the attic and having your HVAC system serviced."

Another area of the home that is sometimes overlooked but really important in winter months is the chimney. Denise Davis, office manager for Davis Brothers Chimney Sweep & Masonry, says that cleaning your chimney ahead of those colder months when you'll be using it is a very important safety precaution.

Most chimney fires are a result of neglect and a chimney that has not been cleaned regularly enough, she says. Sometimes birds will make a nest in the chimney, unbeknownst to the homeowners. This can block up the chimney and possibly even cause carbon monoxide to leak back into the home.

A properly cared for chimney can also have positive energy ramifications—and prevent problems.

"A proper cap on top of the chimney will also limit water damage and increase efficiency by preventing heat loss," Davis adds. "Sometimes homeowners have cracks in their chimney that they don't realize. That's why ongoing inspections and chimney maintenance are so important."

NEWER PRODUCTS ON THE MARKET

One of the benefits of upgrading various elements of your exterior



is that many of the products available today are made with energy efficiency in mind. This is different from products of the past.

Parnes says that they recommend the new fiberglass window and door options because they not only add energy efficiency and comfort to a home, but they are also aesthetic upgrades. They'll boost curb appeal and add wow factor. Parnes says that Global Home Improvement recommends Infinity Fiberglass Windows and Doors from Marvin, which he says are eight times stronger than vinyl and will outperform and outlast wood windows.

Liss agrees that the products available today have also come a really long way. He says that there are new windows, doors, insulated siding, energy-efficient solar shingles and energy-efficient appliances available—all of which are helpful in preventing energy loss.

There are also great options for attic insulation, Liss adds. Just a little bit of extra attention to this area of your home can go a long way in boosting its overall energy efficiency.

Roofing has also evolved—including the way in which they are installed. Mike Iannelli, co-owner of M&J Roofing, has been seeing the same problems emerge in roofs again and again.

"We find that the older generation of roofers didn't put a water and ice shield on the house and didn't put ventilation on the roof. That's huge right now," he explains. "Without that ventilation, the humidity builds up and causes condensation and damages the shingles, which decreases their lifespan. We also found that they would use 15-pound roofing felt, which is almost paper-thin and doesn't provide enough protection between the structural wood and the shingles."

If a new roof is necessary, homeowners should know if it is being installed with all the





proper protections. "Our process from start to finish includes roof deck protection with GAF Deck Armor, which is used under the shingles and provides protection from wind-driven rain and trapped moisture; leak barrier, starter strip shingles, Cobra attic ventilation and ridge cap shingles. We leave nothing overlooked," he continues.

Iannelli says that M&J also has a siding service and uses Alside vinyl siding, a brand that the company trusts.

CHOOSING THE BEST CONTRACTOR

When it comes to making any of these upgrades, choosing the right contractor for the job is important.

"Do your research and discuss any concerns that you may have with an expert," Liss advises. "Lastly, be wary of high-pressure sales tactics."

Iannelli adds that his company only uses employees on staff—not subcontractors.

"I have four supervisors, all with extensive roofing experience and they are on-site for every job and available to the homeowner at all times," he explains. "We stand by the proven materials we offer and take no shortcuts."

MAKING A WISE INVESTMENT

While taking these proactive steps is an investment on the front end, they can also save money (plus hassles and headaches) in the long run. These additions will also increase the value of your home.

Parnes sums it up: "Rather than wait and let another season go by with your home wasting valuable energy, you can have upgrades completed that will get your home ready for the winter." H&H

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Gwen Kunkel and brother Paul Randall

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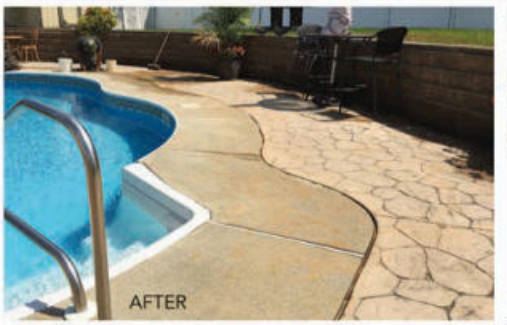
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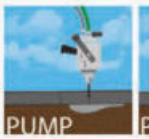
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RENOVATIONS





Heating UP

The key to staying comfortable this winter is making sure your heating systems are running properly.

by **Peter Proko**

WITH THE SUMMER SUN ALL BUT FADED AND OLD MAN WINTER RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER, the cooler temperatures and gloomy weather will see beach blankets replaced by throw blankets as people move indoors for warmer conditions. Which means it's beyond time to find out if your heating or fireplace system is in need of service. Too often an afterthought, homeowners tend to neglect routine maintenance only to come face-to-face with much larger issues that may approach the point of no return.

According to Farrel Shuster, president and owner of Family Heating & Air Conditioning, semiannual checkups would go a long way into preserving your heating system.

"Ninety percent of the failures we see, the heater is going to go in the wintertime and the air conditioner in the summer," he says.

Shuster likens the situation to buying a brand-new car, but still having the need for an oil change to maximize efficiency and avoid more costly repairs down the road.

"For some reason, people don't accept that and try to get away with things and I see it cost them tons more than if they would actually spend the money to make sure the efficiency is there and the parts are not going," he adds. "It's been said that 60% of residential systems are not installed properly."

Jeff Olewine, general manager of C&C Heating & Air Conditioning, also feels preventive maintenance is of the utmost importance.

"Heating and air systems have many components and annual checkups often catch potential breakdowns before they happen in the extreme winter or summer days," says Olewine. "Systems that are not maintained typically have higher rates of failures and issues."

Aside from the age of the system, there are other warning signs for consumers to watch for like frequent breakdowns and a noticeable increase in operating costs. But, when it comes down to determining whether your heating system is in need of being simply repaired or in fact replaced, only an expert will be able to truly tell after examining things and running a diagnostic test.

These days, those replacing their heating systems are increasingly gravitating toward higher-efficiency systems. Over the past decade, HVAC systems have become more technologically advanced and residents are eager to reap the benefits of upgrading their equipment while also keeping rising energy costs down.

"Customers are savvier; they are doing [their own] reading and investigating," says Shuster. "[A new system] is an investment and they want to know how they can reduce their bills and what are some options to make their home more comfortable."

Because there is no one-size-fits-all answer, it is vital for homeowners to seek the professional advice of a skilled and trusted industry professional. A system that is not sized properly, for example, will run inefficiently and cause higher operating costs—even if it just came out of the box.

And with the pandemic putting a renewed focus on indoor air quality, people are looking to improve the conditions inside their homes, especially during the winter months when respiratory viruses are more prevalent. Each home has a certain amount of air changes per hour and that information can be used to calculate how to capture airborne particles to



create the cleanest environment possible.

Olewine says the main things to consider when looking to improve one's indoor air quality are ventilation, purification, filtration and humidity. "There are products and solutions which can improve air quality in different ways and can help provide a healthier environment for you and your family."

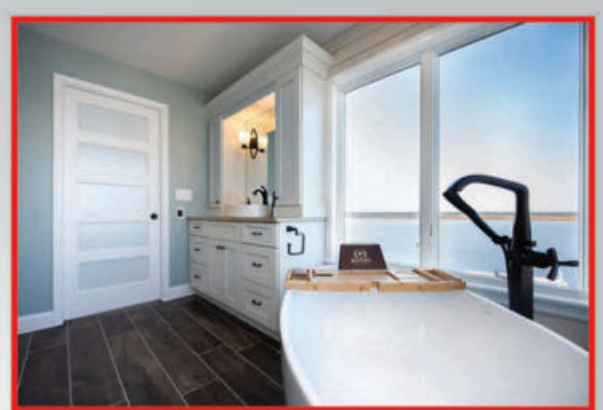
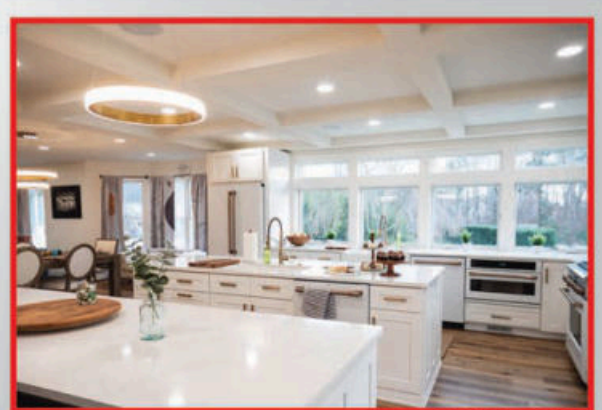
Of course, a smooth operating furnace isn't the only way to turn up the heat to help fight off winter's chill. Besides creating a place to cozy up with loved ones, a fireplace also provides wonderful ambiance and more modern systems can easily become an extension of one's décor.

And there are plenty of options available to suit any household or style preference. While wood-burning fireplaces have a nostalgic vibe to them, the overwhelming number of folks looking to either install a new system or replace an existing one are opting for gas, according to Jen Kester of Kester Fireplace.

"We all can appreciate the traditional wood-burning fireplace, but the problem is they are considered a negative for your house because they heat the room you are in while syphoning the heat from the rest of your house," she says.

According to Kester, vent-free gas log sets are extremely popular at the moment. They are designed to go into an approved wood-burning device and provide an economical solution for bringing more heat into the home without changing the look of your fireplace. And energy-conscious consumers will appreciate the fact that they are 99.9% efficient. Conversely, direct-vent gas fireplaces are only around 70% efficient.

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Heating Up

replace or convert their existing fireplace system, Kester says you'll want to consider these key factors: efficiency, damage and safety. Whether it is wood, gas or electric, depending on the issue, then it may be most cost-effective to change the system for something more updated.

"Sometimes it is more beneficial to upgrade to a current efficient system, which will reduce costs over time," says Kester. "If needing to replace a bunch of parts on an older system, the cost of those parts could end up being close to the cost of a new system. … It is very important to have your fireplaces serviced routinely" to stay ahead of potential issues that may arise in the long run.

While fireplaces are not just for the living room any longer, and are now commonly found in bedrooms, basements and backyards, Kester says the pandemic has certainly spurred a number of homeowners to install new systems inside the home.

"With more people working from home and converting unused spaces into their new office, having a heat source to be more comfortable during the day has also been popular," she says. "We've had many customers say that they've always wanted to add a fireplace to their home and now is the best time for them to do so."

No matter how you plan to keep warm this winter, having a trusted professional assist you is the best way to ensure you don't get left out in the cold. **H&H**



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