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HOUSEKEEPING

DIY strategies to deep-clean carpeting

What's underfoot in a home can go a long way toward making residences comfortable and aesthetically appealing.

A study of home buyer preferences using data from the National Association of Realtors® found that 54% of home buyers were willing to pay more for a home with hardwood flooring. But that doesn't mean that carpeting doesn't still have its devotees. In 2019, the real estate firm Opendoor installed nearly one million yards of carpeting in its homes. Houzz reports that, in 2018, 17% of renovating homeowners purchased carpets and 50% purchased indoor rugs.

Carpeting and rugs can offset some of the shortcomings of hardwood, providing a softer texture that makes for a better landing spot for active young children. However, carpets will require more maintenance than hardwood floors. Learning how to deep clean carpets can help homeowners, as vacuuming is not enough to keep carpets in top form.

Spot clean stains

Stores sell a bevy of carpet cleaning solutions. When applying such solutions, do so in an inconspicuous area of the room to ensure colorfastness of the carpet and that the solution does not adversely affect the fibers. If the spot is clean and the carpet is not adversely affected, you can then apply the solution to more visible areas.

Homeowners who prefer all-natural cleaning solutions rather than chemicals can use a solution of white vinegar, baking soda and salt to make a safe cleanser, according to The Spruce. Soak the stain, use a scrub brush to work in the cleanser and then blot up the liquid with a clean cloth. According to the lifestyle resource First for Women, club soda also works as a cleanser when it is sprayed on a stain.

Deep cleaning

Carpets periodically need to



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Carpets periodically need to be revitalized, and that can be accomplished with a specialized cleaning machine.

be revitalized, and that can be accomplished with a specialized cleaning machine. Many are available for purchase (a good investment for homeowners with kids and/or pets), while others can be rented as needed.

Remove all of the furniture from a room and vacuum to clean dust, dander and any other debris. Address any darker stains first by pretreating with a cleaning solution. Let sit for around 20 minutes. While waiting, learn how to operate the machine, fill it and clean out the soiled water. Never allow the machine to oversaturate the carpet with water, as it

can get into the padding and sub-floor, causing problems like mold or wood damage. Spray the water-detergent solutions, and then pass the carpet cleaner over spots repeatedly until the carpet feels only slightly damp. DoItYourself.com advises running the machine at the pace of one foot per second.

Removing shoes when entering the home can keep carpets clean and reduce wear and tear.

With frequent deep cleaning, carpets can maintain a like-new appearance for years.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Stores sell a bevy of chemical solutions for spot cleaning, and homeowners who prefer all-natural cleaning products can make their own solution at home that is free of harsh chemicals.



With frequent deep cleaning, carpets can maintain a like-new appearance for years.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

HOME DECOR

Decor ideas to give homes a fresh look this spring

Spring is a season of rejuvenation, and that spirit of renewal can take hold inside a home.

Warm weather and longer hours of daylight make spring a perfect time to imagine a home's interior design in a new light. The following are a handful of decor ideas that may inspire homeowners to give their homes an entirely new look this spring.

- **Wallpaper:** Wallpaper fell out of favor years ago, but new styles that aren't so heavily patterned can make for wonderful additions to any room. Large-scale prints can give a room a whole new feel without giving homeowners or their guests the impression that they have stepped back in time. A simple, mural-style floral wallpaper on the walls surrounding a table in a breakfast nook can bring nature inside.

- **Pastel colors:** Nothing embodies the spring quite like pastel colors. If colorful, bright flowers dot the garden in the backyard, homeowners can bring those uplifting pastels inside by painting an accent wall or even adding some brightly colored accent furniture to rooms that could use a lift.

- **Declutter:** Clutter is often conquered during spring cleaning sessions, but homeowners who want to create more free-flowing interior spaces can downsize their furniture and/or look for multipurpose features that make it hard for clutter to take over a room. Create more open space in entertaining areas by mounting the television and getting rid of a bulky entertainment center. Create even more space by replacing rarely used end tables with a storage ottoman where books and magazines can be stored to give a room



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Spring is a great time to reconsider home interiors.

a fresh, clean look.

- **Accent features:** Sometimes the smallest changes to an interior space make the biggest impression. Replace dated accents like vases and table lamps with newer items that reflect the latest styles and trends. Such adjustments won't break the bank, and they can give rooms a whole new feel.

Spring is a great time to reconsider home interiors. This spring homeowners can embrace various strategies, both big and small, to give their homes a whole new feel.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Wallpaper fell out of favor years ago, but new styles that aren't so heavily patterned can make for wonderful additions to any room.



Nothing embodies the spring quite like pastel colors.

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RENOVATION

The average timelines for popular renovation projects

Home renovation projects are significant undertakings. Working with skilled and experienced contractors can ensure projects go smoothly and are completed promptly. Timing is a big consideration for homeowners as they begin renovating their

homes, and the home improvement experts at HomeAdvisor note that the following are some general timelines for popular renovation projects.

- Home addition: Short of a full-scale demolition and rebuild, home additions are the most time-

consuming projects homeowners can undertake. HomeAdvisor notes that its survey of customers who recently completed home addition projects reported that the average time from start to finish was between three and four months. Certain variables, including the

scale of the project and the local permits process, can extend the time it takes to complete a home addition.

- Kitchen remodel: Scale is a big factor to consider when estimating the time it takes to complete various home improvement projects, and kitchen remodels

are no exception. Some HomeAdvisor users reported projects taking as long as four months, though the average time reported was roughly six weeks. Projects that require major overhauls like rearranging the plumbing and moving walls will likely take longer than

more cosmetic projects that are limited to replacing cabinets and countertops.

- Bathroom remodel: More than 1,000 homeowners surveyed by HomeAdvisor reported that bathroom remodels took about 4.5 weeks from start to finish. Small-scale remodels



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Working with skilled and experienced contractors can ensure projects go smoothly and are completed promptly.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

More than 1,000 homeowners surveyed by HomeAdvisor reported that bathroom remodels took about 4.5 weeks from start to finish.

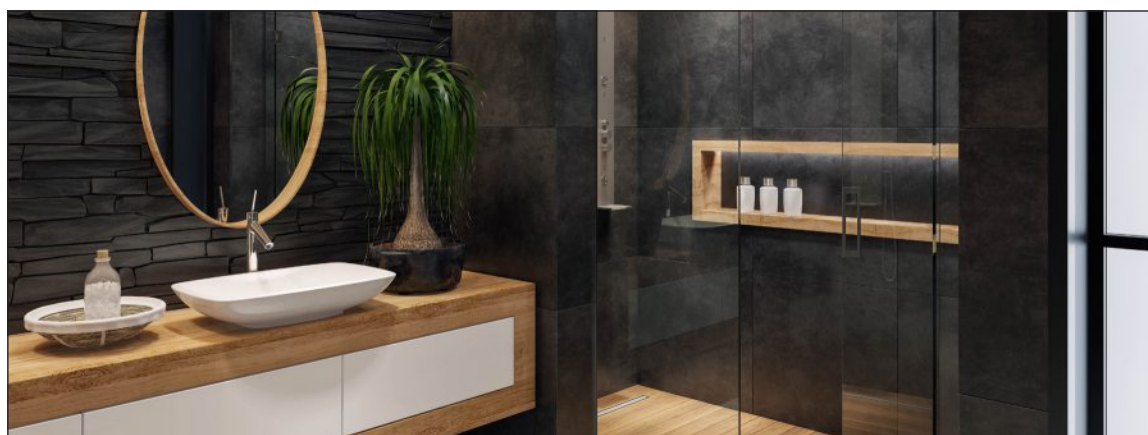
that focus on painting the walls a fresh color and replacing existing tiles can be completed in less than two weeks. But like with kitchen remodels, bathroom remodels that involve replacing plumbing fixtures and removing walls figure to take much longer than that.

- Siding installation: HomeAdvisor users report that new siding projects take roughly two weeks from start to finish. That estimate is the same regardless of which materials homeowners are replacing and installing.

- Replacement windows:

Homeowners who want to replace all the windows in their home can expect such a project to take roughly three weeks. HomeAdvisor notes that such a timeline need not concern homeowners worried that they will be forced to brave the elements during the length of the project. Much of a contractor's time during a window replacement project will be spent on upfront measuring and then ensuring a tight fit once the windows have been installed.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Bathroom remodels that involve replacing plumbing fixtures and removing walls can take several weeks.

HOME MAINTENANCE

5 tips to prepare for window replacement

Winter is coming, and for millions of people who reside in areas of the country that see the mercury drop considerably between December and March, that means prioritizing staying warm. Inefficient or aging housing materials may compromise your ability to do just that.

Drafts from doors, poorly protected attics and basements and aging windows may force heating systems to work extra hard to maintain interior temperatures.

Replacing old windows can make a home quieter by blocking out exterior noises. Consumer Reports also notes that new windows are often easier to clean and maintain than older varieties.

Many homeowners are interested in replacing their windows, but may not know where to start. These guidelines can help the process along.

1 . Get several estimates. Ask for recommendations from neighbors or other people in your area on which companies they used to install their replacement windows. When you interview the prospects, ask several questions about how they go about installing the windows. Questions can include:

- How long will the project take?
- Will I need to remain home during the process?
- Do you discard of old debris?
- What is the protocol for installation during inclement weather?

2 . Research permits. Most home renovation projects need to be approved by the local municipality. Go to the permit office and find out the requirements. Some window contractors will include securing permits in the cost of the project. After the project is completed, an inspector will come by and ensure the work was done according to code.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Ask for recommendations from neighbors or other people in your area on which companies they used to install their replacement windows.

3 . Change up the appearance. Look at the type of hardware you have around the home and other fixtures. Choose windows that have locks or latches that can match those features for continuity of style. Think about choosing a different style or frame color of the window, or a different type of window to improve efficiency and function.

4 . Research top window manufacturers. It's tempting to purchase windows based on price alone, but replacement windows are often a decision that only has to be made once or twice for the life of the home. Invest in durable windows that will have staying power. Consumer Reports offers unbiased reviews on var-

ious window brands and can help homeowners make sound decisions.

5 . Prepare for installation. Clear pathways, remove window treatments and disconnect window alarm systems. Plan for one to two days of installation, advises Andersen Windows and Doors. Keep pets

and children away from work areas.

Replacement windows can be a smart investment. New windows can improve the look of a home, reduce heating costs and can keep interior spaces comfortable.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

COLUMN

Good design is a process

By Kevin Harrison
For MediaNews Group

A good interior designer uses the long established principles of design to make each project successful. These principles are balance, emphasis, contrast, rhythm, scale, harmony and detail.

Balance is the idea that the visual weight of the furnishings and architecture should be evenly distributed around the room. As an example, if you have a fireplace on one side of your room, you need larger scale items on the other side of the room to balance the visual weight of the fireplace.

Balance can be symmetrical or asymmetrical. Symmetrical balance is the most straight forward type of balance in which furnishings are mirrored to create a perfect balance of weight. Asymmetrical balance is more difficult but also a more modern and informal form of balance where visual weight is distributed around the axis of a room.

Emphasis is the method of highlighting the most important element in a room. This can be done with lighting, position, color or even texture. Other elements in the room need to support the highlighted item and should not try to be the star. A room can have several emphasized items, but this can be tricky since the items emphasized have to be in a hierarchy.

Contrast is the use of different levels of color or tones to create visual interest. A black and white interior is the best example of a high contrast space. But contrast doesn't have to be as extreme as black and white, think of a fuchsia throw in a grey



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Harmony is combining very different items in a way that feels appropriate.

room. The throw gives your eyes a recalibration point in a monochromatic room, giving the room more interest.

Monochromatic rooms are rarely one color. They need to have subtle contrast to keep the room interesting and keep it from feeling too flat. A white monochromatic room should use subtle warm grays and beiges in addition to white as contrast and when finished it will appear as a white room, although a more interesting white room.

Rhythm is very subtle in well done rooms, but is no less important than the other principles. Rhythm uses contrast, color, texture or shape in a repeating manner to please the eye. Think of the placement of windows; if windows are repeated in shape and size around a building or room the pattern created is much more pleasing than windows that are randomly placed.

Scale is often the first thing that goes askew in a room and the biggest issue for customers who have started furnishing their room on their own.

Scale is simply using furnishings that have an appropriate visual volume for the room in which they will be placed. A room with sixteen foot ceilings will require larger artwork than a room with nine foot ceilings. It seems logical, but difficult to accomplish from most local retail.

Harmony is combining very different items in a way that feels appropriate. This is important because a room still needs to have some tension which is created when you combine unique items, but these items must be used in a way that feels planned.

Details are the jewelry of any room. What is placed in the bookcases that line the back wall, or what sits on the coffee table, or what is the artwork? Details make the room more interesting and keep it interesting long after the initial viewing.

Kevin Harrison is an interior designer with 30 years of experience and owner of Harrison's Design + Furniture in Clarkston, Midland Furniture Garage in Midland, and Light & Loom in Rochester Hills.

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HOUSEKEEPING

Healthy, safe and affordable home cleaning tips

When it comes to keeping your home healthy, safe and clean, it's all about balance. Using the following tips, you can make 2021 the year you perfect your cleaning technique affordably:

Get Prepped

Before getting started, wash your hands. Not only does it help you to avoid spreading germs, it's also a great way to get into a cleaning mindset.

You can also give yourself a little motivational boost by putting on some great tunes. Check out the Ultimate Cleaning Playlist on Spotify, which features danceable hits spanning decades, or create your own. According to the experts, a bit of preparation can even streamline your efforts.

"Before any cleaning session, I take a few minutes to de-clutter. This makes the process of dusting and wiping down surfaces so much easier," says Erin Chase, AIEn Cleanfluencer and busy mom of four.

Strike a Balance

Contrary to what you might assume, there's no need to use a disinfectant cleaner on every surface, even in the age of COVID-19. High-touch areas such as doorknobs, light switches, remotes and countertops should be disinfected daily. You should also be sure to disinfect after visitors, and continually disinfect surfaces touched by sick household members. However, it's important to use strong cleansers mindfully. The power of bleach is a great way to disinfect properly where and when it's needed. Be sure to use approved products, such as Cloralex Disinfectant Bleach, and follow the instructions on the label. Don't use bleach on



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Give yourself a little motivational boost by putting on some great tunes while cleaning up.

porous surfaces and never mix cleaning products — in particular don't mix bleach with ammonia. This can result in dangerous fumes you shouldn't breathe.

Go Green When You Can

For everyday messes, use naturally-derived cleaning products, such as Art of Green wipes and sprays, which are hardworking and safe for sensitive skin, making them good choices for "over and over" cleaning around kids and pets. Voted a 2020 Product of the Year by more than 40,000 consumers, Art of Green

works on many surfaces and comes in two uplifting scents, Lavender Eucalyptus and Citrus and White Flowers. You can also help protect the planet by choosing products from companies committed to building a cleaner, more sustainable world. Many products from AIEn USA are made with sustainable ingredients, and the company recycles more plastic than it uses.

"The good news is that these products also offer great value, making it possible to get an effective eco-friendly clean at an affordable price," says Chase.

To learn more, visit ale-nusa.com, artofgreen.com

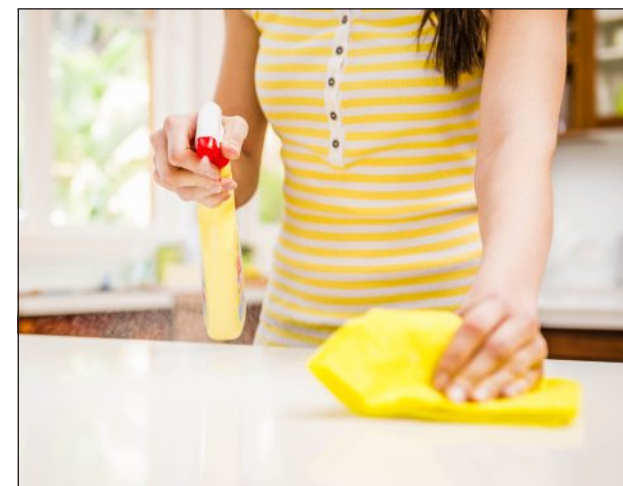
and cloralex.com.

Celebrate a Job Well-Done

"Cleaning is an opportunity to refresh your mindset," adds Chase, who makes sure to celebrate a job well done with self-care rituals. "After cleaning, I always wash my hands and apply my favorite hand lotion."

With a few smart cleaning tips, you can create an environment that helps protect the health and safety of your family and your pets.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



Contrary to what you might assume, there's no need to use a disinfectant cleaner on every surface, even in the age of COVID-19.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

With a few smart cleaning tips, you can create an environment that helps protect the health and safety of your family and your pets.

PRODUCTIVITY

Home office essentials to streamline your work week

If you've been working remotely for months, you're likely long overdue for a home office upgrade. Having the right tools can make working from home easier and less stressful.

Here are a few small tweaks and essentials to consider:

- **Scene change:** Is your home "office" actually the kitchen table or a couch? Keep a healthy boundary between your personal and professional life with a visual cue that indicates when the work day has started and when it's ended. That cue could be the strategic use of a room divider to hide personal items and keep you focused. Or, it could be as simple as plopping a desk lamp onto the kitchen table during work hours to give the surface a professional, task-oriented feel.

- **Number crunching:** Make number crunching and recordkeeping easy with a printing calculator. With Cost/Sell/Margin functionality as well as the ability to check and correct up to 150 steps and print after correction, Casio's HR-170RC is a versatile choice. Printing two lines per second with two-color printing, you can quickly produce paper records of your work for more organized files. With its small footprint, plus calendar and clock functionality, it can help you streamline your desk for a clutter-free, fashionable workspace.

- **Caffeine fix:** Now that your cup of joe is being enjoyed at home most mornings, consider upgrading your coffee maker to fit your tastes and your demanding schedule. If you miss the latte or cappuccino you used to grab on your morning commute, it may be time to replace your standard drip machine with a full-fledged cappuccino and café latte maker. Or, consider going high-tech. New coffee maker models employing smart technology let you brew from bed using just your phone for a guaranteed caffeine fix by your early morning call.

- **Get the full picture:** If you were accustomed to a full-sized desktop monitor at work, but have working on a laptop at home, you may find you are more productive by adding an external monitor to your home office setup.

With it looking more likely that remote working situations are here to stay, it's time to make your home office work for you.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

With it looking more likely that remote working situations are here to stay, it's time to make your home office work for you.



Now that your cup of joe is being enjoyed at home most mornings, consider upgrading your coffee maker to fit your tastes and your demanding schedule.



HOME IMPROVEMENT

DIY ideas to increase your home's value

Now as much as ever, your home may be a sanctuary for all kinds of expression, from thinking and dreaming to working and playing. Over the past year, homeowners began to consider the intersection of function and design in new ways.

Weekend warriors are dedicating themselves to creating more organized living spaces and making their homes better places for learning, working and living. If you're considering upgrades to your home, consider these DIY ideas from the experts at Royal Building Products that can increase beauty and resale value.

Home Office

Spending more time at home may mean storage space is at a premium, especially if you're relying

on a makeshift home office. You can add a high-impact and functional element to your office with a built-in bookcase or workstation. Consider your materials carefully since they have a big impact on your final results. For example, a versatile alternative to wood is synthetic polyvinyl chloride (PVC) trim, which you don't need to sand or prime before painting, ultimately saving time, energy and money. While PVC is slightly more expensive than some wood options, it also requires less maintenance long-term.

Bathroom

By updating worn-out items, modernizing fixtures and creating a more functional space, you can expect to recoup up to 50% of

a bathroom's remodel cost, according to the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. If you're considering an on-trend look like shiplap, a practical solution like Royal prefinished PVC Shiplap can help create a clean, comfortable space. It's waterproof, mold resistant, flexible and works well in spaces with many slants and angles. Plus, it's lightweight and easy to install.

Entryway

A home's foyer offers the first impression of its interior, teasing the personality of architecture and decor found with each step deeper inside. Whether bold and dramatic, tranquil and serene, or something in-between, the entryway often sets the tone for a home's ambience. Details like dec-

orative molding and lattice trim can create a striking entryway for almost any home style.

Exterior

Whether you're sprucing up an outdoor living space or simply want to boost curb appeal, subtle enhancements can make a big impact. For example, board and batten shutters offer an attractive, low-fuss way to highlight your home's windows. Painting the front door is another low-cost way to freshen up your exterior. Or invite a touch of nature by adding flower boxes to your front porch or windows.

Find more creative inspiration, tools, tips and practical steps for every level of DIY-er at buildroyaldiy.com.

Select a Trim Style to Match Your Home Style

The right style of trim can transform a room into a whole new space. A good rule of thumb is to keep the style of trim consistent with your home style and from room to room.

Craftsman: The craftsman home style pairs well with simple, tailored and purposeful doors and minimally ornamented window casings while white, light beige and cream-colored crown moulding can create roomier spaces.

Colonial: This home style's rustic simplicity and rich detail call for interior trim that lends a touch of stately courtliness. Choose multi-piece trim and wider baseboards, wainscoting and crown moulding to adorn family room floors, walls and ceilings.

Cape Cod: This practical and quaintly unassuming design can be accented by

subtle interior trim such as transom windows and sidelights that surround multi-paneled entry doors, casings for double-hung windows, picture rails and frame walls.

Modern: The clean expansiveness of this home style lends itself to unadorned window and door casings as well as baseboards. You can go minimalist and use trim merely to protect walls and floors. Alternatively, you could rely on trim to create an appealing contrast with the wall colors.

Ranch: Open, informal and inviting, this style needs trim work that flows from room to room. Many styles work, from simple baseboards to more formal trimmed windows and cabinetry in the kitchen, fireplace mantels in the family room and passageway casings.

Story courtesy of Family Features

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HOME IMPROVEMENT

Should I DIY?: 3 questions to determine if it's best to renovate on your own



No two homeowners are the same, but the following three questions can help homeowners determine if DIY is their best option.

A do-it-yourself mentality has taken hold in millions of households across the globe. Popular television channels like HGTV and DIY Network as well as accessible home improvement content on apps like YouTube has inspired many homeowners to tackle renovation projects around their homes. Taking such initiative is admirable, though it also can prove costly if homeowners end up biting off more than they can chew.

Home improvement videos and television shows have a tendency to oversimplify renovation projects, potentially giving

homeowners a false sense of confidence in their DIY abilities. A concerted effort on the part of homeowners to determine if it's best to renovate on their own or hire a professional should always be the first step of any renovation project. No two homeowners are the same, but the following three questions can help homeowners determine if DIY is their best option.

1. Can I afford to DIY?

Professional home improvement projects are costly for a variety of reasons. Materials can be costly, but so are the tools

and labor necessary to do the job right. Homeowners may not have the tools necessary to complete complicated projects. Specialty tools can be expensive to purchase or even rent, and the cost of acquiring such tools should be included in any DIY project cost estimates. Labor also factors heavily into professional projects, and for good reason. Talented contractors have unique skills that have been developed and perfected over many years. Those skills can ensure projects are completed quickly and correctly. Labor may seem costly, but such costs may ultimately

prove to be a bargain compared to the cost of fixing DIY mistakes. Projects that are minor in scope and don't require the use of potentially costly specialty tools may be better suited for weekend warriors than more complicated renovations.

2. Do I have the time?

Homeowners must determine how much time they have to complete a project before deciding to do it themselves. No one wants to spend months staring at an unfinished renovation project. Homeowners who are already pressed for time may not be able to complete

projects in a timely fashion, which can make homes less comfortable and even less safe.

3. Can I pull this off?

DIY projects can instill homeowners with a sense of pride in their homes, but it's imperative that homeowners considering the DIY option conduct an honest assessment of their skills. A lack of renovation experience does not necessarily mean a homeowner cannot successfully complete a DIY project. But in such instances, it may be best to start with small, straightforward projects and then gradually move up to big-

ger, more complicated projects as skills are fine tuned. And homeowners who have never been at their best with a hammer in hand should not be ashamed to leave the work to the professionals.

Television shows and online tutorials can make renovations appear easier than they actually are. Homeowners considering DIY renovations can ask themselves a handful of questions to determine if they're ready for the challenge of renovating their homes on their own.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



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Homeowners considering DIY renovations can ask themselves a handful of questions to determine if they're ready for the challenge of renovating their homes on their own.



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HOME DECOR

BRIGHT IDEAS



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Adaptability is important in the living room, where homeowners may host anything from movie nights to book clubs to parties for the big game.

How to choose the right lighting inside your home

Lighting in a home serves both practical and aesthetic purposes. It's easy to maneuver around a well-lit home, reducing the risk of slips and falls, and the right lighting can help homeowners create their desired ambiance, which typically changes depending on which room you're in.

When choosing lighting for their homes, homeowners must walk a fine line between appearance and functionality. A fixture in the foyer that instantly impresses visitors likely won't prove as awe-inspiring if it's installed in the living room. When choosing lighting for a home, some general rules about what works in each room can help homeowners make the most informed decision.

Kitchen

Kitchens are often the busiest room in a home, so lighting here can be especially important. A

kitchen often benefits, both practically and aesthetically, from different types of lighting. For example, pendant lighting above kitchen islands can make meal preparation easier and safer, but such lighting likely won't work in breakfast nooks and informal dining areas in the kitchen. Recessed lighting works best in such areas. In kitchens with no island, under-cabinet lighting can be used to illuminate countertops and simplify meal preparation.

Formal dining room

Many people enjoy the look of chandeliers in formal dining rooms, and such fixtures can be installed directly above the dinner table. The interior design experts at Better Homes & Gardens advise hanging chandeliers roughly 33 inches above the table in dining rooms with eight-foot ceilings, adding three inches for

each additional foot above eight feet. Darkened dining areas may be ideal in restaurants, but homeowners may want to split the difference at home and choose dimmable chandeliers for their dining rooms. This allows homeowners to dim the lights for romantic dinners but turn them up for family gatherings with lots of people around the table.

Living room

Adaptability also is important in the living room, where homeowners may host anything from movie nights to book clubs to parties for the big game. It can be a tall order to accommodate such a wide range of activities, and many homeowners come down to deciding between recessed lighting and track lighting. If the living room currently has neither style, homeowners should recognize that it will cost considerably less to in-

stall track lighting than recessed lighting. Better Homes & Gardens notes that flexible track lighting provides ambient, task or accent lighting, and track lights can even be moved to change lighting schemes at any time, making them a budget-friendly option for homeowners whose living rooms are multi-purpose spaces. Recessed lighting also works well in living rooms, especially ones with low ceilings. That's because recessed lighting is installed into the ceiling, meaning it does not take up any visual space in the room. That can help living rooms feel bigger.

Bedroom

The home improvement experts at BobVila.com note that bedroom lighting should provide enough light when getting dressed, but also be able to be toned down as residents prepare

for their bedtime routines. Both portable and installed lighting can be used in bedrooms to serve these various functions. Recessed fixtures that dim can ensure there's ample light to get dressed in the morning, but they also can be dimmed at night as residents try to get ready to sleep. Portable nightstand lights can make it easier for couples sharing a bedroom, allowing one person to stay up and read while the other goes to sleep.

Homeowners have many options and many needs when choosing lighting for their homes. A professional consultation with a lighting expert or interior decorator can help homeowners find lights that provide both practical and aesthetic appeal.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

When choosing lighting for their homes, homeowners must walk a fine line between appearance and functionality.

When choosing lighting for a home, some general rules about what works in each room can help homeowners make the most informed decision.

HOME DESIGN

How home design trends are evolving for social distancing

COVID-19 has brought changes to everything, and home design is no exception. Experts are expecting to see lasting impacts on everything from the materials we use to the rooms we prioritize. Check out these and other noteworthy trends:

Houses over apartments

Many people who live in condos or apartments do so to be closer to the action — work, entertainment and shops —

and never planned on spending much time at home. But the pandemic has changed that, and more people are going to want a home that offers plenty of room and outdoor space in case they need to self-isolate again.

Self-sufficiency

A hard lesson we've learned is that things and services we thought we could count on aren't necessarily a sure thing,

so items that increase self-reliance will become very popular. Expect to see more homes with sources of energy like solar panels, sources of heat like fireplaces and stoves, and even urban and indoor gardens that allow you to grow your own produce.

Outdoor living

Between playgrounds closing and parks becoming overcrowded, many of us are turning to our balconies, patios and back-

yards for fresh air and nature. This means we're going to be investing more in our outdoor spaces, with functional kitchens, soothing water features, cozy firepits, and high-quality outdoor furniture to create a much-needed escape.

Healthier spaces

Thanks to spending more time indoors and reprioritizing our health, we'll turn to design to help ensure our homes are safe



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Items that increase self-reliance like solar panels or backyard gardens are becoming more popular.

and healthy for our families. We'll see a rise in products like water filtration systems as well as materials that improve indoor air quality. For new homes and additions, alternatives to wood-framing like insulated concrete forms from Nudura, which offer improved ventilation for healthier indoor air quality and an environment that's less susceptible to mold, will be key.

Home office space

Business experts are suggesting many companies will see that working from home is not only possible but offers tangible benefits, like saving money on office space rent. With working from home on the rise, creating a home office space that inspires productivity will be a major project many of us tackle. Luxury home office furniture that feels chic and blends into your décor as well as ergonomic chairs and desks will see a major boost.

Custom and quality

With the hit to the economy, people are going to be buying less, but what they do buy will be better quality, while at the same time making an effort to support American businesses. When it comes to design, trends will shift to locally made furniture, custom-built homes and pieces and materials that stand the test of time.

Find more information at nudura.com.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Experts are expecting to see lasting impacts on everything from the materials we use to the types of homes we buy and rooms we prioritize.



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RENOVATION

8 tips for a successful home renovation



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Working with reputable professionals makes all the difference in the quality of the work and the materials used to complete the project.

Thinking of remodeling your home? From safety and security to product and contractor selection, there are many factors to consider.

Follow these eight remodeling tips to help minimize hassles during a renovation:

1 . Create a budget. Create a project budget and set a spending limit. Whether you plan to utilize savings, home equity loan, line of credit or free up funds through refinancing, now is the time to identify how you will finance the project, and how much you want to spend.

2 . Prepare the house. Before work starts, clear all spaces where professionals will be working, as well as walkways they will use to access these areas. Remove valuables and breakables to avoid damage and cover furniture in areas where paint or dust could harm upholstery. Keep other considerations in mind. For example, if you're renovating the kitchen, you may need to create a temporary food prep area.

3 . Work with reputable professionals. When selecting a contractor, be sure they have references, certification and an understanding of the project. For example, when tackling window and door projects, Andersen Windows, Inc. recommends hiring an Andersen Certified Contractor to do the job. These contractors receive product training, installation resources, offer an exclusive 2-year limited installation warranty, and their expertise and experience in an extensive range of residential projects means they're able to capture your vision for your home and work with you to provide the right products.

Bottom line: working with reputable professionals makes all the difference in the quality of the work and the materials used to complete the project.

4 . Schedule wisely. Choose a time-frame for your home renovation that best fits your busy schedule. Keep in mind that unforeseen circumstances can sometimes cause



When selecting a contractor, be sure they have references, certification and an understanding of the project.

delays. Build this into the timeline so you're not taken by surprise.

5 . Address safety. Talk to your contractor about what COVID-19 measures they practice to help keep customers and employees safe. Find out whether they're following CDC guidelines for businesses, including always wearing a mask, social distancing whenever possible and frequent hand washing. Also, ask if they offer virtual consultations that allow you to start the process contact-free.

6 . Add or update your security system. With professionals frequently coming in and out of your home, a home renovation may be a good time to add or update your security system with reprogrammable smart locks. Offering more convenience and greater control, the Yale Assure Lock for Andersen patio and entry doors for example, is a sleek, key-free entry lock that makes it easy to grant access to contractors for limited periods of time, lock and unlock doors from anywhere and monitor from afar.

7 . Communicate openly and effectively. If a renovation is done correctly, you may never need to repeat the process. This makes open and honest communication with your home renovation team essential. Be sure to share your vision and to ask questions as they arise. At the same time, expect the professionals working with you to communicate regularly and address all your concerns.

8 . Get a return on your investment. Prioritize projects that will po-

tentially raise the resale value of your home. According to FortuneBuilders, the top 10 greatest returns on investment for home renovations include bathroom and kitchen remodels, landscaping, replacing entry doors and replacing windows. It also helps to select products that come with transferrable warranties. This will give your property a tangible leg-up on the market when it's time to sell.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Prioritize projects that will potentially raise the resale value of your home.

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Spring is the perfect time to prepare for warmer temperatures, unexpected outages

By Jane Peterson
For MediaNews Group

With Daylight Savings Time behind us and warmer temperatures on the way, there's no doubt that spring will be here before we know it. After a long winter, there are plenty of spring maintenance chores to take care of around the house and yard. Air conditioner maintenance and generator installation are two tasks that you should consider adding to your to-do list this year.

Goyette Mechanical specializes in plumbing, heating, cooling and electrical installation and maintenance for residential and commercial customers throughout mid-Michigan, including northern Oakland County.

Residential Service Manager Mike Anson said preventative maintenance now can save time, money and headaches later. April and May are great months to schedule a maintenance checkup because technicians have more time since air conditioner emergencies are virtually non-existent this time of the year. During a maintenance visit, Goyette technicians will provide an 11-point inspection that includes cleaning the condenser coil, checking the refrigerant levels, inspecting for corrosion and other signs of wear and tear on outdoor equipment, flush drains and test the air conditioning system to make sure it will turn on when you need it to.

While Goyette installs Bryant High Efficiency Air Conditioning systems as well as most major air conditioning unit brands,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GOYETTE MECHANICAL

Goyette Mechanical offers free in-home estimates with no obligation. Sales associates and technicians are mindful of COVID-19 safety protocols, taking care to wear face masks, bootie covers and gloves as required and sanitizing their hands and tools frequently.

it services all brands, including those they did not install. Technicians are licensed and certified through manufacturers so they know how to service specific brands. Because technology changes so quickly, certifications are renewed every few years.

Goyette also has a number of technicians on staff who have earned the UA (United Association) STAR certification, which requires an HVAC service technician to pass the STAR exam, a nationally recognized test that identifies a technician's qualifications and skill levels in the heating, air conditioning and plumbing industry. Other technicians have received the North American Technician Excellence

(NATE) certification. NATE is a nationally recognized certification for HVAC technicians that is achieved by passing multiple levels of exams.

Furnace and air conditioning units are generally designed to last for 15 years.

"A furnace and air conditioning unit is one of the largest purchases you'll make for your home," said Anson.

Annual maintenance may be able to extend the life of the unit, but with new technology impacting the energy efficiency of furnaces, you may want to consider upgrading on schedule. Regular maintenance can also enhance energy efficiency, saving you money on your monthly bill and

with repair costs.

Goyette Mechanical was founded in Flint in 1928. Generations of family members have operated the business, which has grown to be among the largest heating/cooling, electrical and plumbing companies in the state of Michigan. Goyette serves all of southeastern Michigan and has multiple service trucks out on the road at all times. Emergency service is available 24/7, 365 days a year for those in need.

Spring storms can often create emergency situations, especially when it comes to power outages and flooded basements, said Anson. Goyette installs and services home generator systems, which can protect your house in the



Goyette Mechanical specializes in plumbing, heating, cooling and electrical installation and maintenance for residential and commercial customers throughout mid-Michigan, including northern Oakland County.

event of a power outage whether you are home or not. Several different types of generator systems are available, from those that provide coverage for the full house to others that offer protection to a few essential devices, like the sump pump and refrigerator.

Generators can be more affordable than you think, said Anson, especially when you consider the costs of a flooded basement and weigh that against the fact that most homeowner insurance policies do not cover losses caused by flooding unless you specifically purchase flood insurance. Goyette offers several different brands, including Honeywell and Generac. Technicians install and service the generators.

Goyette Mechanical offers free in-home estimates with no obligation. Both sales associates and technicians are mindful of COVID-19 safety protocols, taking care to wear face masks, bootie covers and gloves as required and sanitizing their hands and tools frequently. For more information, visit GoyetteService.com or call (877) GOYETTE.

HOME DESIGN

NEW HOME TRENDS



PHOTO COURTESY OF SINGH HOMES, WEST BLOOMFIELD

This home office in Charleston Park South Lyon can also be converted into a school office space, yoga room, guest room or play area.

What today's buyers covet most

By Lana Mini

For MediaNews Group

As the nation continues to see lower-interest rates, buyers have more ability to build a luxury home from the ground up – having their choice on every amenity.

Styles evolve every decade or so and developers design homes to suit the needs of one important opinion: the buyer.

What amenities and features are most in demand and what is up-and-coming in homes right now? What do buyers really want in a home?

Some features may be obvious: shiny hardwood floors continue to skyrocket in popularity. The National Association of Realtors 2019 Remodeling Impact Report said new wood flooring remains in the top 10 list of desires for buyers. Complete gourmet kitchens rank number one followed by modern master bathrooms with a spa-tub.

Most popular features in a home initially start as “wishes,” but over the years become “must haves.”

“The stay at home orders of last year accelerated the demands of what buyers were already moving toward,” said Matt DeLapp, general manager of Singh Homes, a luxury home builder based in West Bloomfield. “Specifically, the need for flexible spaces. Multiple home offices were already becoming more popular in new builds, but Covid-19 restrictions turned it into a demand that is here to stay as the need for school study and work from home spaces became a stark necessity.

“Flexible space on each level, can transform into guest room space, play

rooms, office, school space, yoga room, gaming area, play rooms,” DeLapp said.

Singh's luxury development at Charleston Park in South Lyon was designed to suit today's family needs with designs that rapidly evolved to the lockdown.

“A good developer listens to the current demands of buyers, and has the perspective to understand which amenities are short lived trends and which are here for the long haul,” DeLapp said.

For example, a multi-generational suite - designed to provide space for multiple generations to live together in the same home - is an option that continues to grow as Baby Boomers age. Having a home where parents can live independently in their own spacious suite – with their own bathroom, kitchen, and living space is important to many. DeLapp said.

Quick Delivery Luxury is also growing in importance as inventory in the resale market remains limited.

“People don't want to wait to have a new home built to their desires. They are busy and want a seamless move,” DeLapp said. “We see this in our program that builds quick luxury homes that are move-in ready and packed with today's important amenities: luxury master suites with fireplaces, solid hardwood throughout, wired alarms and speaker systems, bonus lofts upstairs. Today there isn't a need to compromise what you want, even if you are in a hurry to move.”

The brand new Preston, and the Upton, both colonials, in South Lyon, are Singh's newest homes designed with that, and more, in mind.

Social island configurations in the kitchen, walk-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SINGH HOMES, WEST BLOOMFIELD

White kitchens featuring large social islands were once “wants” that now have become “must haves,” according to Singh Homes, a luxury homebuilder in West Bloomfield.

in pantry, large gourmet kitchens with large cabinets, pocket offices, elite master suites with luxury showers are standard features because homeowners demand them, DeLapp said.

Stylish laundry rooms, larger garages to include storage space and master walk-in closets are no longer on the list of features that buyers are willing to give up. On the exterior, home buyers want natural colors that blend beautifully with Michigan's natural landscapes.

“Smart home features for energy efficiency, safety and security, and entertainment systems are desired items and sooner rather than later will evolve into must-haves,” DeLapp said. “In the end, every amenity is about the home buyer living a better life. That, in our opinion, is a must-have that a buyer should never compromise.”



Kitchens with large windows or sliding doors and larger cabinets are some of the most popular asks for today's homebuyers.

SAFETY

Tools that can keep people safe at home



It is vital that homeowners install carbon monoxide detectors in their homes.

Homes should be sanctuaries for their inhabitants. Keeping homes safe and sound requires both maintenance and some caution designed to make homes less vulnerable to potentially costly issues.

Promptly addressing maintenance issues around the house can reduce the risk of accident or injury. In addition, various items can alert homeowners to problems they may not otherwise recognize before issues jeopardize residents' health or take a turn for the costly.

Auto shut-off features

Who hasn't left the house only to worry an hour or so later about whether the coffee pot was turned off or the straightening iron was unplugged? When shopping for personal care items or appliances, seek out models that have automatic shut-off features. This safety feature will power down the unit

after a certain amount of time, which can reduce the risk of overheated products and house fires.

Flood and leak detector

The financial information and wellness resource Canstar says leakages, burst pipes and other water-related issues in a home are one of the more common home emergencies. Water damage can cost between hundreds and thousands of dollars depending on how invasive the water problem is. Catching a leak or flood in a home early on is essential.

Water leak detectors are designed to detect a potential flood or leak at an early stage so homeowners can take action. Sensors may sound an alarm or be connected to a WiFi system to send an alert to a mobile device.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A sump pump can mean the difference between a flooded basement and a dry floor.

Carbon monoxide and gas detection

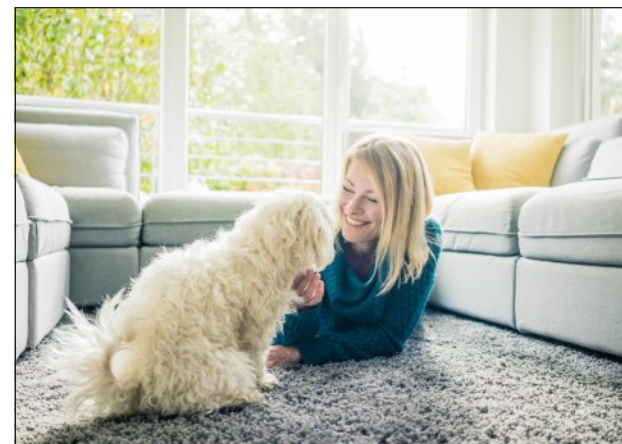
It is vital that homeowners install carbon monoxide detectors in their homes. Carbon monoxide is odorless and colorless, and can cause poisoning that slowly suffocates a person. It also is combustible.

Carbon monoxide devices cannot detect a gas leak, but gas detectors can. They are a wise addition for people who have a significant number of natural gas appliances, or those who have older, gas-powered appliances.

Sump pump alarm

A sump pump can mean the difference between a flooded basement and a dry floor. Homeowners may not recognize a sump pump malfunction during a power outage, and clogs also may not be detectable until the basement floods. Sump pump alarms incorporated into the system alert homeowners that something is amiss.

Homeowners can rely on devices and other tools to prevent their homes from being damaged and themselves and their families safe.



Promptly addressing maintenance issues around the house can reduce the risk of accident or injury.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Quiet home noise with soundproofing

Many people want their homes to be comfortable, relaxing retreats. While much thought will be given to layout and decor, the noises in and around a house also can affect how enjoyable a space is or isn't.

Certain offenders are driving up the noise levels in homes. New building materials that are lighter than those used in the past can make it easier for noise to travel between rooms. In addition, open floor plans make it easy for noise to travel from room to room, while handheld personal devices can make rooms noisy. Homeowners who want more peace and quiet in their home can take the following steps.

Add more drywall

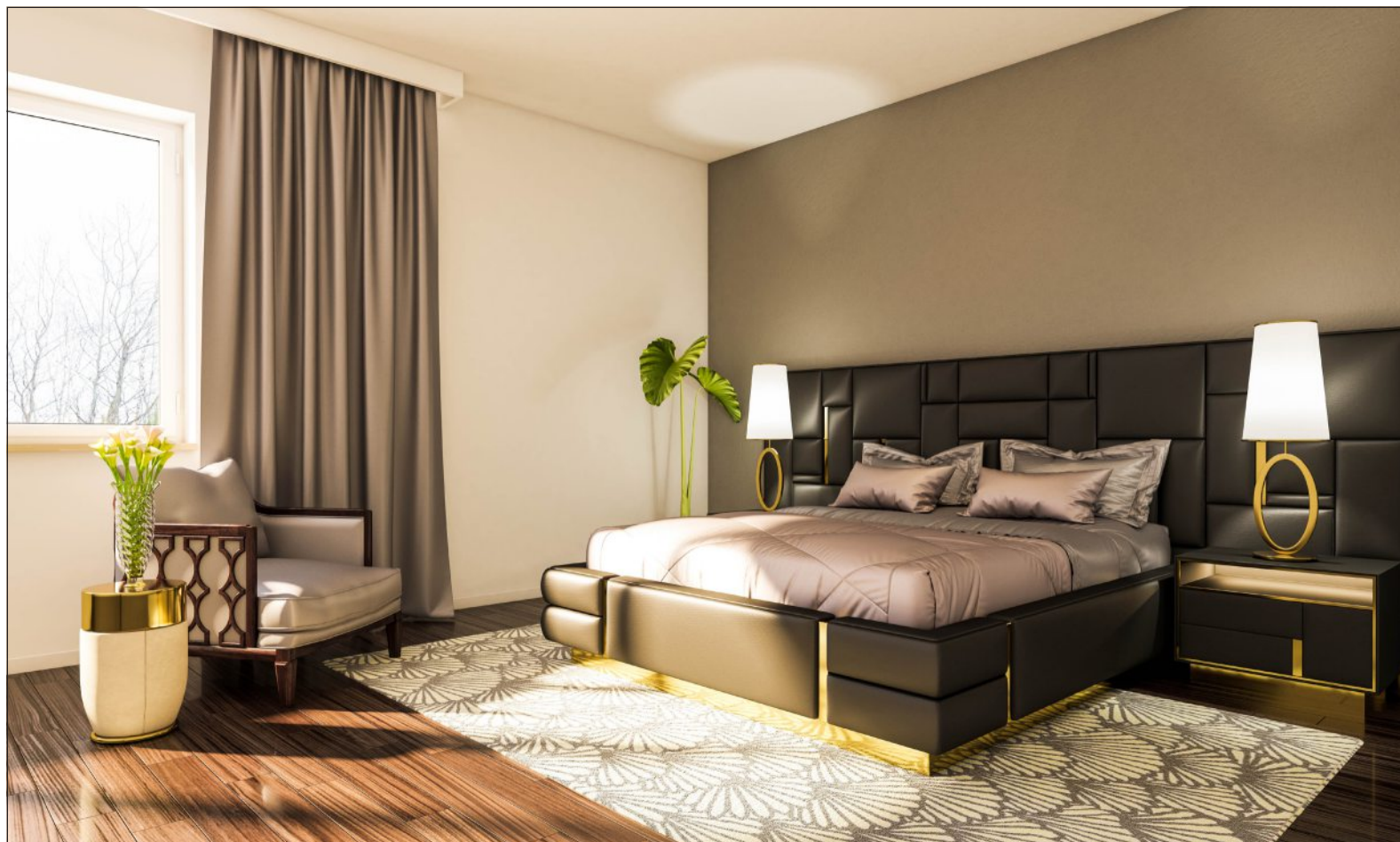
Homeowners may not be able to add walls of sturdy brick to block sounds, but they can add more drywall in noisy rooms. Consider adding more drywall to a library or reading nook. The home improvement resource HomeLogic notes that drywall can be used to isolate noisy rooms, such as those where kids practice playing musical instruments.

Beef up dense materials

Heavy curtains, fluffy furniture and thick carpets can make rooms quieter because they help absorb sound waves. Such items and materials also can help prevent echoes. Bare walls and floors will only make sounds bounce around.

Seal holes and cracks

Noises from outside can sneak around gaps in windows, doors and siding. Making sure gaps are



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Heavy curtains can help make rooms quieter by absorbing sound waves, reducing echoes.

sealed will not only make a home more energy efficient, but also help block out some exterior noises.

Fix squeaky floors

Wood floors can shrink and expand, leading to movement and the development of squeaky areas. By fixing squeaky floors, homeowners can reduce noise created when people walk through their homes.

Soundproofing a home can be a relatively easy and effective DIY project.

Photo courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



By fixing squeaky floors, homeowners can reduce noise created when people walk through their homes.

SAFETY

How to stay safe during your remodel amid COVID-19

Many homeowners still find themselves stuck at home due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. With all the extra time spent indoors, some homeowners are re-evaluating the space they occupy and turning to remodelers to help them safely and effectively complete home improvement projects.

However, the pandemic has changed the way homeowners and remodelers communicate even before stepping foot on site. Doing as much pre-service consultation as possible over the phone, by video meeting or through email is recommended.

"I'll have customers take pictures and have them forward me that information to pre-qualify them and see if we're a fit before I actually go on site," said Andy Apter, president of Apter Remodeling/Craftsman. "In today's environment, people are enthusiastic to provide those photographs. If they want to take the next step then I meet them in person."

Like any remodeling project, communication between the homeowner and service provider is key.

"Communicate any concerns you may have," Apter said. "I can't address concerns if homeowners don't open up."

Despite concerns over health and safety, members of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) like Apter are equipped to get the job done safely and ethically.

Members pledge to adhere to a strict code of ethics that observes the highest standards of honesty, integrity and responsibility. One code is taking appropriate action to preserve the health and safety of employees, trade contractors and clients.

Once on site, the remodelers

adhere to all safety protocols when entering a home. As with any remodel, portable restrooms are brought on site for the remodeling team. The team also masks up before entering any household. Apter takes it a step further by designating entrance and exit paths for his team to maintain social distancing.

Homeowners can also do their part to maintain a safe work environment for the remodeling team. If you're working from home, try to set up your workstation in an area other than the one undergoing renovations. It is also important to limit interactions with the remodeling team. In instances where communication is necessary, homeowners should always wear a mask and remain at least two arm lengths away from the contractor.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends maximizing ventilation in the household while service providers are on site, such as opening a window or turning on the air conditioner. The CDC also recommends using touchless payment options or paying over the phone, if possible. After any visit, remember to clean and disinfect any surfaces the remodeling team may have come in contact with.

Despite the precautions both homeowners and the remodeling team take, the timeline and budget of your remodeling project doesn't have to be affected. Apter said COVID-19 safety measures have not delayed any of his projects.

If you're ready to start your home improvement project in 2021, visit remodelingdoneright.com.

Story courtesy of National Association of the Remodeling Industry/Family Features



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Like any remodeling project, communication between the homeowner and service provider is key.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GETTY IMAGES

With all the extra time spent indoors, some homeowners are re-evaluating the space they occupy and turning to remodelers to help.

INTERIOR DESIGN

Reasons to hire an interior designer

How many times have you sat on the sofa pouring over a home magazine wishing your rooms could be ripped from its pages? Some people are gifted with a natural talent to impart a space with perfectly balanced colors and schemes that fit with one's lifestyle and design preferences. Others are not as equipped. But that doesn't mean design has to suffer. An interior designer with knowledge and resources who's in your corner can make all the difference.

Many people are hesitant to bring in professional designers because of cost. But contrary to popular belief, working with an interior decorator is not something reserved for the rich and famous. Designers actually can save homeowners money in the long run. A good designer will choose the right amount of high-quality elements that will be durable and timeless. This means less money will ultimately be spent on replacing cheap materials or redesigning rooms that have gone out of style.

According to the design experts at Homepolish, utilizing a designer to transform a space can create rooms that are more in tune and balanced with homeowners' needs — helping to improve mood and functionality. That can extend to other areas of a person's life and well-being. Putting the task of designing a home's interior in someone else's hands frees up time to focus on other projects as well.

Designers can look at a space with a careful eye and not be influenced by items that have sentimental attachment. He or she can help decide if anything should be repurposed or removed. Plus, an interior designer can help homeowners

stay on budget.

Designers also can serve as liaisons for clients who have difficulty communicating with builders and architects. Designers are trained to think about things that homeowners tend to overlook, such as placement of lighting, outlets and room flow. He or she also likely has contacts within the industry that can be utilized, saving even more time and money.

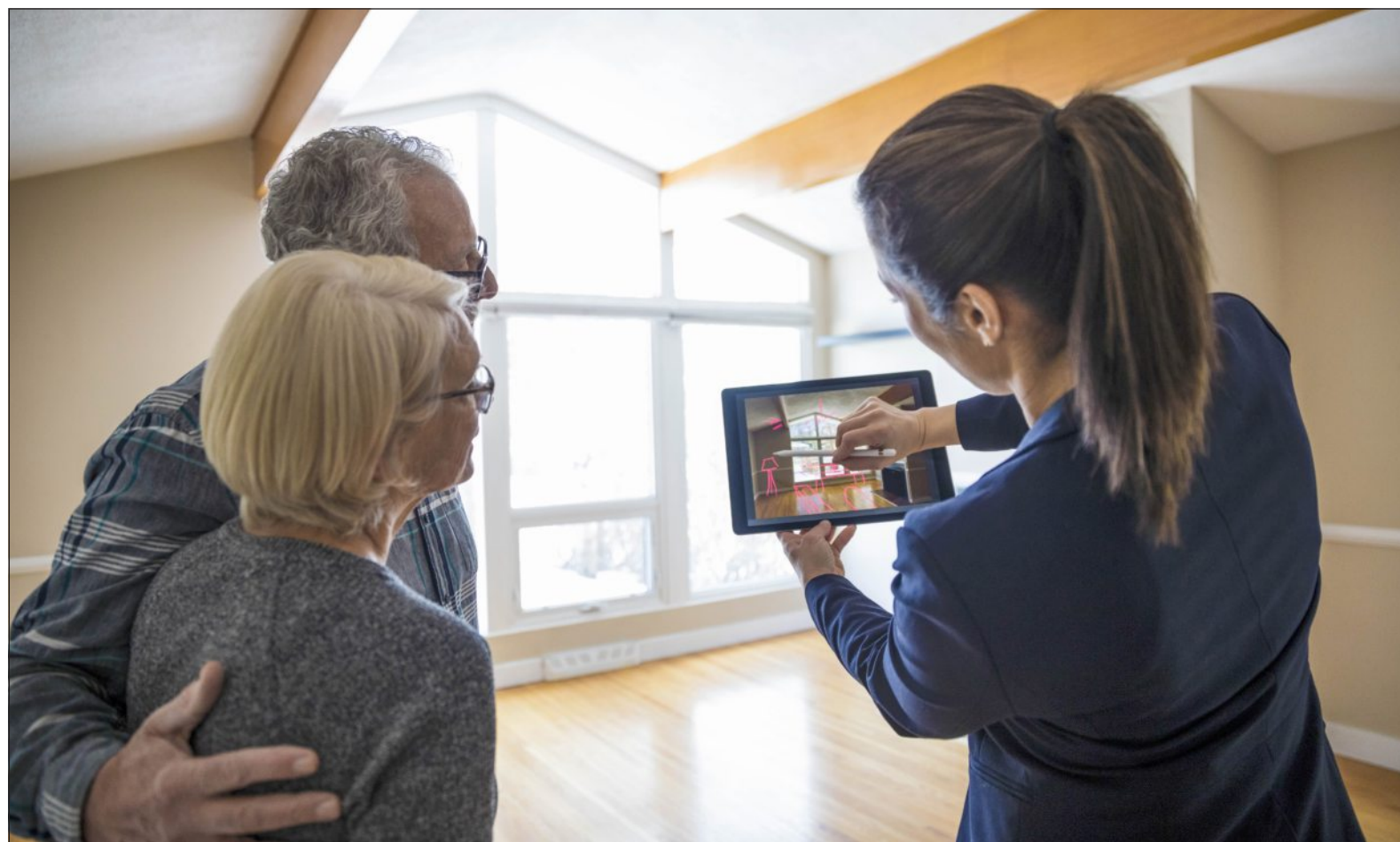
A good designer can be worth the investment. The end results will be an interior that homeowners will be proud to call home.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Working with an interior decorator is not something reserved for the rich and famous.



A good designer can be worth the investment.

HOUSEKEEPING

Caring for kitchen countertops

Kitchen remodels are a popular home improvement project that help homeowners recoup large percentages of their initial investments at resale. A kitchen remodel can invigorate a home and make the most popular room in the house more functional.

According to HomeAdvisor, a home-improvement informational guide, homeowners spend an average of \$22,000 on kitchen remodels. However, lavish projects can cost more than \$50,000. Protecting such investments is important and requires that homeowners understand how to properly maintain kitchen features so they have the longest life possible. This includes the new countertops that make the kitchen look complete.

Countertops come in various materials, not all of which should be treated the same way. Quartz, granite, marble, laminate, and tile countertops require different types of maintenance.

Quartz

Engineered quartz countertops are popular. Quartz countertops are nearly maintenance-free and resistant to stains, scratches and even heat. Quartz will not need to be sealed like natural stone and can be cleaned using just a damp cloth with a mild, nonabrasive soap.

Granite

Polished or honed granite countertops offer a high-end look that adds instant value to a kitchen. Natural variations in granite give each kitchen a custom look. To keep granite countertops clean, avoid abrasive cleansers that can scratch, and opt for warm, soapy



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Countertops come in various materials, not all of which should be treated the same way.

water instead. Stains are possible, but can be remedied with a baking soda paste left to sit for a couple of hours, advises Angie's List. Wipe up oils, acids and soda promptly to avoid stains, and follow advised sealing routines.

Marble

Marble is a natural stone that is porous and will need to be resealed periodically. Because marble has high levels of the mineral calcite, it can be reactive when acids come in contact with it, and etch marks may ap-

pear. Promptly wipe away tomato juice, lemon juice, perfume, or toothpaste. Marble is softer than granite and will wear at a faster rate. Avoid scratching and exercise caution when using knives or sharp objects around marble.

Laminate

One of the more budget-friendly materials, laminate countertops can be fabricated to mimic the look of natural stone, wood or even quartz. Laminate is less resistant to damage than other materials and



Quartz, granite, marble, laminate, and tile countertops require different types of maintenance.



Check with the manufacturer or installer of the countertops to learn more about the ways to clean and maintain new counters.

will need a gentle touch. Formica® says to never use abrasive cleansers, scouring pads or steel wool when cleaning laminate countertops. For tough stains, an all-purpose cleaner should suffice when applied with a nylon-bristled brush. Test any cleanser in a discreet area first.

Tile

Cleaning tile countertops requires getting into crevices along the grout lines. A toothbrush and a mildew-fighting cleaner or bleach diluted with water is advised. Also, unglazed tiles need to be sealed yearly. Some soap may leave residue, which can be

removed with a solution of vinegar and water.

Check with the manufacturer or installer of the countertops to learn more about the ways to clean and maintain new counters.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

INTERIOR DESIGN

6 color trends to help improve your mood

Now that many homes also double as offices, entertainment centers and even classrooms, the colors, sights and sounds you surround yourself with on a daily basis can play a critical role in fostering a positive mental space.

With the rise in external stressors correlating with an increased interest in mindfulness and self-care activities like yoga, meditation and aromatherapy, Valspar introduced its 2021 Colors of the Year with 12 livable shades that evoke calm, serenity and simplicity. Since a physical space can directly impact your mindset, this year's colors have been selected to bring a sense of well-being to your walls, ultimately blending home improvement with self-improvement.

To help make the world of color a multi-sensory experience, the paint manufacturer partnered with author, sound therapist and meditation teacher Sara Auster to convert the colors into a soothing, calming and uplifting experience through "The Sound of Color."

"This was a revolutionary idea for us, taking the signature colors we're known for and creating a multi-sensory experience that goes much deeper than colors on a paint swatch," said Sue Kim, Valspar color marketing manager. "We are very pleased with how this project turned out and think our customers will really enjoy interacting with our 2021 Colors of the Year on a whole new level."

The range of cozy, comfortable shades provide flexibility and can be incorporated into existing design elements of your home. Consider

these samplings and find the full on-trend palette at [Valspar.com](https://www.valspar.com).

Optimistic

Yellow hues feel cheerful and can help elevate your mood. Optimistically warm, Soft Candlelight invites optimism and radiance with a golden glow that can light up any number of spaces.

Secure

Inspired by the protective qualities of natural stone, Granite Dust can help fortify your home against the worries lurking beyond the walls, creating a personal haven. The versatility of the color allows it to read warm or cool, providing flexibility to adapt to your decor.

Courageous

Vibrant and bold, Arizona Dust is a modern apricot shade that embraces tones from nature and helps bolster courage for whatever you're facing next. Consider this playful hue in a satin sheen for added moisture resistance in spaces like bathrooms and mudrooms.

Sophisticated

Modernly classic like the beauty of white roses, Garden Flower is a soft, natural tint that captures a sense of sturdy growth and reliable sophistication to put both hosts' and guests' minds at ease. Black and white decor can help complement this shade that evokes clean growth on walls.

Confident

For the minimalists whose approachable ele-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Yellow hues feel cheerful and can help elevate your mood, while grey inspires a soft confidence that is modern and natural.

gance demands a space as effortlessly confident as they are, Gallery Grey inspires a soft confidence that is modern and natural. Bold architectural features can take center stage against warm gray walls.

Balanced

Subdued but inviting, the shadowy pastel of Dusty Lavender creates a soft but unexpectedly dynamic feel that is bright yet still soft. Carrying a shade such as this onto ceilings can give small rooms a larger appearance.

Story courtesy of Family Features/Valspar



PHOTO COURTESY OF VALSPAR

The range of cozy, comfortable shades provide flexibility and can be incorporated into existing design elements of your home.

With the rise in external stressors correlating with an increased interest in mindfulness and self-care activities like yoga, meditation and aromatherapy, Valspar introduced its 2021 Colors of the Year with 12 livable shades that evoke calm, serenity and simplicity.

ORGANIZATION

Clever storage ideas for small spaces

No matter how cramped and cluttered your living space may be, you can almost always find a spot or two for extra storage. It's often just a matter of getting creative and utilizing a few clever solutions.

Consider these simple ideas to create some extra space in oft-used rooms:

Kitchen

Metal rods with hanging hooks can create storage space on your blank walls. Use them to hang coffee cups, cooking utensils, dish towels or pots and pans.

Magnetic strips mounted on the wall or the inside of a cabinet door can be a simple way to hang knives and free up counter space normally taken up by a knife block.

If your countertop is cluttered with small spice containers and oil bottles, elevate them with a decorative cake stand. Place small jars below and top with pretty decanters and additional spices.

If you're using prime cabinet space for items you only use once a year, such as holiday cake pans or a big serving bowl you pull out for parties, consider storing them in the attic or a closet instead.

Bathroom

Instead of hanging just one towel bar on the back of the bathroom door, hang multiple to maximize your drying space.

Most modern cabinetry has adjustable shelving. If you haven't customized the heights of your shelving to accommodate different sized bottles and containers, give it a try.

A three-tiered fruit basket might seem perfect for the kitchen, but it's also a handy way to store bathroom essentials right beside the sink.

Flour and sugar canisters can also be repurposed in the bathroom to keep makeup, toiletries, cleaning supplies and soaps contained. Make sure to buy bins that stack easily.

Bedroom

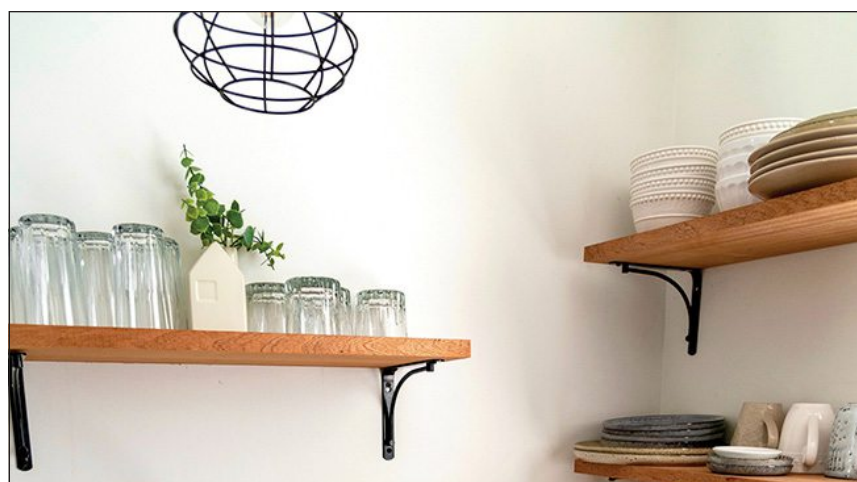
Nix those nightstands and hang small shelves on either side of the bed. This cuts down on the clutter you can keep and makes cleaning underneath a breeze.

Rolling bins that fit under the bed are perfect for storing linens, out-of-season clothing and children's toys. They're also the perfect way to slide building block projects out of sight without destroying your child's latest masterpiece.

Closets with a single hanging rod are one of the biggest space-wasters in the bedroom. Double their storage capacity by hanging a second rod or shelf below shorter jackets and shirts.

Find more ideas to maximize your space at eLivingtoday.com.

Story courtesy of Family Features



It can sometimes take a little creativity to come up with impactful storage solutions for smaller living spaces.

Proper storage is vital to keeping a smaller home organized.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNSPLASH

PLANNING AHEAD

Renovating your home? How to protect your investment

The increased time spent at home during the pandemic has resulted in many people deciding to tackle home renovation projects. From creating a new office space or virtual learning area, to larger projects like bathroom renovations, many homeowners are rolling up their sleeves to do the improvements themselves.

And the trend doesn't seem to be slowing down. In fact, the Leading Indicator of Remodeling Activity (LIRA) projects the remodeling industry will be even stronger in 2021, up 3.8% compared to 2020. During the pandemic, homeowners have fixed up or added on decks, updated landscaping and installed new roofs, among other projects. According to HomeAdvisor's latest annual State of Home Spending report, the number one completed project was interior painting – 35% of households painted in 2020, making a visual impact with a low investment.

What's on your to-do list? If you're considering an upgrade but not sure where to start, check out the results of a national survey by Erie Insurance, conducted prior to the pandemic, which revealed what homeowners don't have, but wish they did. Here are the top five:

1. Walk-in pantry: This topped the list with just under a third of respondents (30%) saying they wish they had one. Kitchen renovations are typically on wish lists, and Houzz reported that demand for kitchen remodelers was up 40% in June 2020 compared to the year prior.

2. Granite countertops: 17.8%

3. Kitchen island: 16.8%

4. Tankless water heater: 16.4%

5. Finished basement: 16.2%

Regardless of the new



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Making home updates can be as big or small an endeavor as you like. If you do take the plunge, be sure you protect your investment.

features or upgrades you choose, it's important to let your insurance agent know so you can make sure you have enough homeowners insurance coverage.

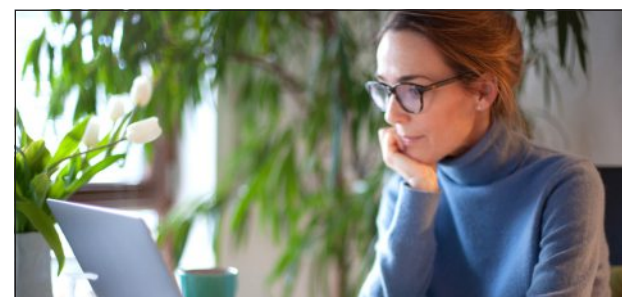
"We understand how important the home is; that's why we provide coverage to suit every home and budget," says Bob Buckel, vice president and product manager at Erie Insurance. "Our variety of optional endorsements helps you customize your policy without break-

ing the bank."

Consider expanding your coverage beyond the standard homeowners policy with endorsements – like equipment breakdown to cover that new tankless water heater. They can also cover stolen or misplaced jewelry, sewer or drain backups, cyber-crimes, identity theft and underground service lines. Adding these extra coverages to your home policy can provide you with the com-

fort knowing all the extra work you put into sprucing up your home will be protected. To make sure you have what you need for your home and everything in it, talk to an insurance agent or visit [ErieInsurance.com](https://erieinsurance.com). Making home updates can be as big or small an endeavor as you like. If you do take the plunge, be sure you protect your investment.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



Regardless of the new features or upgrades you choose, it's important to let your insurance agent know so you can make sure you have enough homeowners insurance coverage.

INTERIOR DESIGN

Colorful Kitchen Inspiration

Five impactful, on-trend cabinet stylings

The kitchen is the heart of many homes, and careful planning is a necessity when it comes to redesigning this essential living space. Picking out cabinetry - and a color for those cabinets, in particular - can be a challenging process.

Everything from the style of your cabinets to the amount of natural light your space receives are key factors to consider when choosing an updated hue. While white cabinets are an everlasting choice, and wood-stained cabinetry once held 70% of the market, painted cabinets now account for 70% of sales, signaling a significant shift among homeowners and their preferences.

While there are virtually no limitations when it comes to the paint, stain and glaze options available to complement your overall kitchen design, the current stylings reflected in Wellborn Cabinet's annual color trends provides an opening to a range of impactful colors, such as grays, blues, blacks and wood tones, and a mixture of these on-trend hues.

A Gray for Every Mood

While gray cabinets have been a popular design choice for several years, much like shades of white, no two grays are exactly alike. Cabinet colors live on a color spectrum that ranges from warm to neutral to dark; warm grays have yellow or brown undertones while cool grays have hushed hues of blue.

Neutral gray, or Ash, is a true black and white mixture of colors. However, many homeowners are opt-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WELLBORN CABINET

One of today's hottest trends in kitchen cabinetry is the use of shades of blue, which provide calming and restful effects and the feeling of harmony and serenity.

ing for warmer or cooler shades instead. For example, light gray cabinets can create a chic, modern motif for homeowners looking to liven up their space while avoiding completely white cabinetry. One of the latest gray trends is a warmer gray that can look almost beige, earning the nickname "greige." Shades of dark gray - whether painted or stained - are also options for making a luxurious, traditional statement that can span ever-changing color trends.

A Sea of Blue

One of today's hottest trends in kitchen cabinetry is the use of shades of blue, which provide calming and restful effects and the feeling of harmony and serenity. Pops of blue can be used as an accent color on islands or on either upper or base cabinets. To

balance out these dramatic darks, many homeowners are opting to pair a bold color choice like a navy hue - such as Bleu - with neutral to warm whites, such as wool and bone white, to create a crisp, clean look. Gold hardware can be used on navy cabinetry for an upscale and regal look while silver-tone hardware provides a contemporary finishing touch.

While lighter shades of blue, like aqua, are perfect for keeping spaces light and airy, one of the latest colors to emerge is a mid-tone classic blue. A balanced option like Sapphire from Wellborn Cabinet, which is a classic, mid-tone royal blue available in the Premier and Estate Series framed cabinetry, as well as the full-access, frameless Aspire Series, can help create energy and inspiration for dining or cooking.

Mixed Wood Tones

Even with the rise in painted woods, stains are seeing a surge in popularity. The application of stain to natural wood can enhance the character of the cabinetry. Neutral color, dimension, texture and soft luxury can be layered into nearly any space to create a blended balance.

Wood grains typically pair well with whites, grays, blues and brass tones - all of which are popular colors in modern kitchens and other localized entertaining areas such as in-home refreshment areas or bars.

Dark Drama

Often overlooked as more of an "accent" color, black has become livable, luxe and inviting with textured woods adding rustic, homely charm. For example, Wellborn Cabinet offers a decorative laminate ve-



Often overlooked as more of an "accent" color, black has become livable, luxe and inviting with textured woods adding rustic, homely charm.

neer option in matte black. Edgy but classic, black cabinets can pair perfectly with nearly any design element still in its natural wooden state to create a distinct style that is all your own.

Multi-Tones and Unexpected Pops of Color

While all-white palettes have long reigned supreme in the kitchen for their timelessness and versatility, straying from neutral tones can add an energetic and welcoming feel to nearly any space. Smaller kitchens that once had an all-white look are getting a facelift by adding a burst of bright, bold color on either the upper or base cabinets. Adding colorful retro appliances or using the island as a canvas for an energetic and welcoming pop of

color can also make a similar statement and help create a space unique to your style and personality.

Many homeowners are even pairing two or more complementary colors to create two- and three-toned looks. For example, lighter gray, Shale or blue can be used for the upper cabinets with darker shades used below for the base cabinetry, or a neutral hue can be used on the uppers with a contrast color on the bottom. In three-toned kitchens, an additional color or material is introduced to create asymmetry in the palette to help define zones or functions and keep the eye moving.

Find more on-trend kitchen inspiration and color options at Wellborn.com..

Story courtesy of Family Features/Wellborn Cabinet

ORGANIZATION

Ready, set ... refresh! Quick tips to revitalize your most-used spaces

Have the cold winter months left your home feeling a bit dirty, drab or disorganized? Are you feeling the urge to purge? Then it's time for some spring cleaning. With a few simple tips and tricks, your home—and mood—can be refreshed and revitalized.

For the biggest payoff for your efforts, focus spring cleaning in the areas of the home that are used most: the kitchen and bathroom.

▪ **Clear kitchen clutter:** According to research from the Mayo Clinic, de-cluttering can have a significant positive effect on your mental health and well-being.

To start your refresh, toss anything that's expired or no longer being used. Use a wall-mount spice rack to free up shelf space and keep ingredients within easy reach. Add sanity to the silverware drawer by giving all gadgets their own spaces with Spectrum HEXA In-Drawer Organizers. HEXA organizers feature a unique, six-sided honeycomb base design that offers a sturdy foundation while allowing crumbs to fall through its base away from clean utensils. Simply, "lift and sift" to clean drawers.

▪ **Labels & liners:** Add a new level of organization and personalization to cabinets, drawers and even wire racks with shelf liners. Available in a variety of colors and patterns, they offer a smooth top and grip bottom for easy sliding of items. Plus, the smooth surface catches messes and spills, making clean-up a breeze. Next, create custom labels for organizer bins with chalkboard or dry

erase adhesives from Duck brand. For wire racks, add shelf liner to the bottom to hold items in place.

▪ **Get savvy at the sink:** Next, move to one of the germiest areas of the kitchen: the sink. To keep this area neat and clean, add an organizer (such as Spectrum HEXA Sink Organizer, which has a built-in soap pump) to keep all cleaning essentials—sponges and brushes—upright and dry and help resist the growth of bacteria. Excess water is captured in the base, which can be easily removed and wiped clean. Finally, place a raised mat in your sink basin to encourage air and water flow for faster drying, and to provide extra cushion for fragile glassware.

▪ **Banish bathroom battles:** From towels to toiletries, bathrooms collect a lot of "stuff." Keep the daily-use items and purge the rest. If you have limited shower space, use a suction shower basket or shower caddy to hold shampoo and soaps. Add an over-the-tank toilet paper holder to store extra bath tissue and keep it out of the way. Just like the kitchen, utilize small baskets or HEXA in-drawer organizers to keep everything from makeup to medicine easily accessible and in the right place.

▪ **Conquer cluttery cords:** Conquer cords and counter-top clutter by utilizing vertical spaces. Add shelves to walls to hold towels or smaller items, and add over-the-cabinet accessory baskets to the insides of cabinet doors. These easy-to-install organizers keep items like



PHOTOS COURTESY OF STATEPOINT MEDIA

Add sanity to the silverware or utensil drawer in your kitchen by giving all gadgets their own spaces.

your blow dryer, straightener and curling iron out of sight, but within arm's reach, for a faster morning routine.

For more unique organizational products, visit spectrumdiversified.com and follow the conversation at #LiveLifeOrganized.

Soon, with a bit of cleaning and organization focused in key areas of your home, you'll be feeling refreshed and revitalized this spring.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



From towels to toiletries, bathrooms collect a lot of "stuff." Keep the daily-use items and purge the rest.

SECURITY

Keep your home network secure with these simple steps

Working and learning from home is the new norm for millions of American families. They're engaged in a daily juggling act, making sure everyone has the bandwidth and privacy to complete their work, whether it's the latest algebra assignment or the monthly all-staff meeting. Add in streaming services, online shopping and an assortment of other digital activities and it's easy to see why cybersecurity might become an afterthought.

Unfortunately, that's exactly what cybercriminals and hackers are counting on. The FBI has reported a rise in the number of online fraud schemes related to the coronavirus with the intent to steal money, personal information or both.

"The digital nature of everything we do makes it essential for all of us to understand the basics of cybersecurity and to put some simple practices in place to keep our families safe," said Todd Thibodeaux, president and CEO of CompTIA, the Computing Technology Industry Association.

According to cybersecurity experts at CompTIA, a good first step is to check how old your equipment is, whether it's your own, rented or leased from an internet service provider. Routers, modems, switches, access points or any other device hooked up to the home network should be less than five years old. Anything older should be replaced because its built-in security protections are woefully outdated.

Strong passwords are critical throughout your home, starting with your Wi-Fi network. Don't name your home network "try and hack me" or include personal information in the network name. You don't want to call any at-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANNASTILLS / ISTOCK VIA GETTY IMAGES PLUS

With the widespread use of digital devices, it's easy to lose track of everything that's connected to your home network.

tention to yourself via the network name. Be sure to check the encryption level for your home wireless network. At the very minimum you want the encryption option set to WPA2.

Factory-installed default passwords and settings on digital equipment are an open invitation to hackers. This information is often found online, making it easy for hackers to access your network. If any of your home network equipment still relies on the password it had when installed, change the password.

Creating passwords is always a matter of balancing security and convenience. While simpler passwords are easier to remember,

they're less secure. On the other hand, you don't want to make them so complicated you'll have trouble remembering them. Set passwords to something that's a little challenging, but that you'll remember.

Whenever you receive notification about a security patch or software update, make sure you install them right away. Companies make these updates available when they discover bugs to fix or security holes to fill. It's a good practice to have your router and other devices set to automatic updates so the latest security patches and software updates are installed soon after becoming available.

To learn more of the ba-

sics of cybersecurity, visit The Future of Tech at futureoftech.org.

With the widespread use of digital devices, it's easy to lose track of everything that's connected to your home network. Take a regular inventory and if you see something that shouldn't be there, block it or remove it from the network.

Finally, review your security settings at least once a year. Take the time to look at all of the settings to make sure everything is in order. With the uptick of online fraud, beefing up your home cybersecurity measures is more important than ever.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

The FBI has reported a rise in the number of online fraud schemes related to the coronavirus with the intent to steal money, personal information or both.

HOME DECOR

Affordable tips for spring decorations and celebrations

The arrival of spring brings with it warming temperatures, blooming flowers and endless springtime celebrations. It is also an opportunity to try something new, whether it is in the garden, kitchen or around the home.

To help find the fun this season, the experts at Dollar General are offering some affordable spring tips and tricks for celebrating and decorating.

Decorations to Spring into the Season

Celebrate spring holidays with extra flair around the home. From adding a colorful vase of flowers to the coffee table, a new wreath on the front door or new pastel-colored pillows for the couch, seasonal decorative touches can help provide a fresh look and pops of color to any home. Consider adding festive holiday-themed decorations too, like a centerpiece filled with plastic eggs on the dining room table.

The Season of New Beginnings

As they say, April showers bring May flowers. To celebrate the season of new beginnings, set some time aside to plan out this season's garden with fresh flowers, as well as fruits and vegetables to enjoy all

summer long. Spruce up your home's outdoor spaces by painting flowerpots bright new colors and by adding new outdoor or solar lights. With longer days approaching, having the perfect outdoor oasis may invite everyone to spend more time outside.

Try out a Seasonal Spring Recipe

Spring can also be the perfect time to try out a new recipe, whether it is a new side, main dish or a sweet seasonal dessert. Get some inspiration from DG Easy Meals, which provides meal ideas that anyone in the family can try out, including "Better For You" recipes that offer healthier food choices using ingredients readily found at DG stores. Featured recipes include a BBQ chicken salad perfect for a spring cookout, an apple slaw with honey mustard vinaigrette to complement any weeknight dinner and pink bunny cupcakes that can be assembled as a tasty activity for kids.

By freshening up home decor, creating a dreamy outdoor space or trying out the latest spring recipes, everyone can affordably find something to be excited for this spring.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



Spring offers an opportunity to try something new, whether it is in the garden, kitchen or around the home.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

From adding a colorful vase of flowers to the coffee table, a new wreath on the front door or new pastel-colored pillows for the couch, seasonal decorative touches can help provide a fresh look and pops of color to any home.

HOME DECOR

Easter trees makes festive spring decorations

Easter is coming and it's time to put up the tree. For those thinking right now that trees are for an entirely different Christian holiday, you are both right and wrong. Even though trees may be more widely associated with Christmas, Easter trees are an increasingly popular and festive tradition that trace their roots to Germany.

The Easter tree is known as Ostereierbaum in Germany and is a centuries-old custom. Eggs are hung on outdoor tree branches and bushes or are placed on cut branches displayed inside. While the tradition is traced to Germany, German-influenced locales like Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and the Pennsylvania Dutch region of the United States also are popular places for Easter trees to appear.

For 50 years, one person branched out with his own Ostereierbaum tradition. Volker Kraft decorated an apple tree on his property in the town of Saalfeld, Germany, adding more eggs each year as the tree grew larger. The tradition came to an end in 2015. At one point the tree held 10,000 eggs, all hand-crafted by Kraft and his family. However, a tree in Rostock, Ger-

many held the Guinness World Record for tree with the most eggs — a display of 80,000.

While Easter trees are typically more modest than Kraft's tree, the displays can be as large or as small as one desires. Many Easter trees consist of a few branches placed in a vase decorated with flowers, ribbons and Easter eggs. Pussy willow branches work well, though any branches can stand in.

When decorating Easter trees, families can use plastic eggs or even real ones. Using a sharp knife or needle, make two small holes in a raw egg. Blow out the inside of the egg until the shell is hollow. Then decorate the egg and thread a ribbon through the holes so it can be hung on the tree. If desired, place sweet Easter treats, such as chocolate eggs or pastel-colored cupcakes, under the Easter tree.

Decorating an outdoor tree also is possible and very visible. It can be a great way to share Easter blessings with others in the community.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

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REAL ESTATE

How home buying and selling preferences are modernizing

Deciding to buy or sell a home is among the most important choices many people make in their lifetimes. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed a great deal about personal real estate transactions and, as with many aspects of daily life, it is an increasingly digital process.

In fact, the pandemic is shifting how people approach real estate on a broader scale, from the timing of their moves and where they want to live to the amenities they require and how they go about finding the perfect house.

Consider these findings from a survey conducted by Opendoor among more than 1,200 people who plan to buy or sell a home in the next 12 months.

Shifting priorities

More than one-third of home buyers will adapt their moving timeline based on the COVID-19 vaccine, according to the survey.

Lifestyle is another major consideration for those considering a move in the coming year. Across Millennials and Generation X, the most frequently cited reason for buying a new home was lifestyle changes caused by COVID-19, even more so than traditional reasons such as getting married or having a baby. About one-third of buyers said the pandemic has influenced where they'll choose to live with 35% of Millennials reporting plans to move to large cities but 33% of Baby Boomers preferring the suburbs.

The amenities people want in their homes have shifted as a result of COVID-19 too, with home offices, kitchens and outdoor entertaining spaces all increasing in importance. This change in preferences was especially pronounced in Millennials.

Digital experience

Since the pandemic hit, digital solutions have answered all kinds of needs and real estate is no exception. As many as 75% of home buyers report they would be likely to consider buying a home through a company that allows them to control more of the process with digital tools.

It's not just home buyers who are changing things up; sellers are also eager for new digital options, too. More than 70% of sellers said they were likely to consider selling their homes to a company that uses technology to make an instant offer.

Among the benefits of going digital to buy or sell real estate is the reduced risk from social interaction. Taking the process online eliminates concerns buyers may have about visiting multiple unfamiliar homes in the quest for the right fit, just as many who are selling are cautious about having friends and family over, much less potential buyers they've never met.

However, pandemic aside, there are other advantages to digital real estate transactions, including the ability to bypass the headaches and uncertainty that come with prepping, marketing, listing and selling a home. Selling to an iBuyer like Opendoor gives homeowners an all-cash offer so they can move quickly, easily and with certainty.

Sellers have the flexibility to choose their closing dates and avoid extra costs and headaches like double mortgages if the first home doesn't sell before the new home closes. Buyers can tour homes on their own schedules and bypass stressful bidding wars with competitive cash offers. The process is entirely online



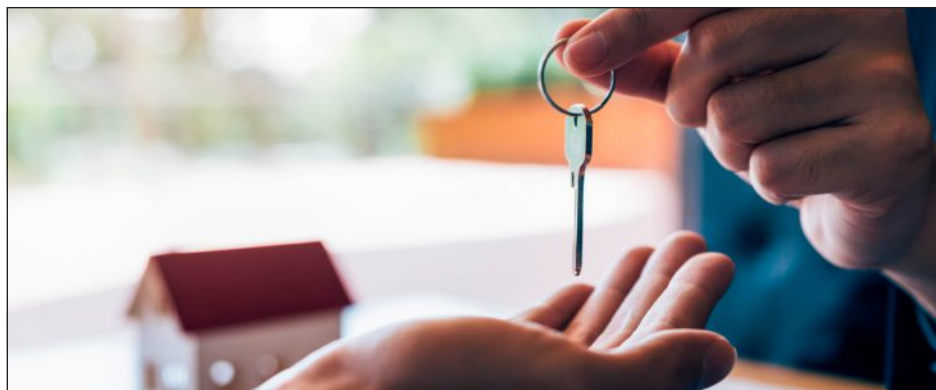
PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Since the pandemic hit, digital solutions have answered all kinds of needs and real estate is no exception.

and contact-free, from offer to virtual inspection and closing, which means extra safety in today's environment. Cash-backed offers from Opendoor make being an all-cash buyer more accessible, enabling customers to compete easier in hot markets.

If a move is on your horizon, learn more about how digital buying or selling works at opendoor.com/cashoffer.

Story courtesy of Family Features/Opendoor



The pandemic is shifting how people approach real estate on a broader scale, from the timing of their moves and where they want to live to the amenities they require and how they go about finding the perfect house.

SAFETY

4 tips for creating a healthier home

People are spending more time at home, where their living spaces have become classrooms, gyms, offices, restaurants and more. The additional time at home provides a unique opportunity to make changes to create healthier living environments.

In fact, a majority of Americans (54%) report being more concerned about having a healthy home since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a recent online survey of 2,000 adults conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of Carrier Global Corporation, a leading global provider of healthy, safe and sustainable building and cold chain solutions.

If you're looking to improve your living space, consider these

tips for making your home the healthiest it can be:

- Create an ideal sleep environment. Most people sleep most comfortably when the air is slightly cool, so target a room temperature between 65-70 F. If this is cooler than you keep the home during the day, consider using a programmable thermostat that automatically lowers the temperature at bedtime. Also, remove distractions that may keep you awake and, if necessary, use a white noise device for uninterrupted sleep.

- Improve indoor air quality. Maintaining heating and air conditioning filters is a concern many homeowners reported. According to the survey, 49% of respondents are concerned about

reducing dust, pollen and other indoor pollutants as part of their filter maintenance.

In addition to changing air filters on a frequent basis, air purifiers and humidifiers can help make the air inside homes fresher, cleaner and more comfortable. For example, third-party testing has shown the Carrier Infinity Whole Home Air Purifier inactivates 99% of select viruses and bacteria trapped on the filter, such as those that cause common colds, streptococcus pyogenes and human influenza. The purifier was also tested by a third party against the murine coronavirus, which is similar to the human coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 that causes COVID-19. In that testing, the purifier inactivated

99% of coronavirus trapped on the filter.

- Update fire protection. Since the pandemic began, people are also more concerned about fire safety precautions in their homes, such as smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. Smoke alarms should be installed on each level of your house and inside each bedroom. Test smoke alarms monthly and replace batteries as needed. In addition, install a fire extinguisher on each level and consider one for the kitchen, as well. Make sure to check extinguishers routinely and replace every 10-12 years.

- Install carbon monoxide alarms. Another cause for concern amid COVID-19 is the potential for dangerous levels of

carbon monoxide (CO) in homes. CO alarms should be installed on each level of the home and outside sleeping areas, and it's important to test them monthly. Consider installing alarms with a 10-year battery, such as the Kidde Wire-Free Interconnect 10-Year Battery Combination Smoke & CO Alarm for less hassle. It offers wire-free interconnect capability, a voice warning feature that accompanies the loud alarm tone and verbal announcements such as "replace alarm" at the end of the alarm's life.

To learn more about creating a safer, healthier home, visit carrier.com/healthyhomes.

Story courtesy of Family Features/Carrier



PHOTO COURTESY OF GETTY IMAGES

The additional time at home provides a unique opportunity to make changes to create healthier living environments.

RENOVATION

Renovation trends that figure to be popular in the future

Home renovation trends are ever-changing. Renovations that might have been de rigueur 20 years ago may seem dated now. Recognizing the potentially popular trends of tomorrow is a great way for homeowners to give their homes a fresh new look and put themselves in position to capitalize on popular trends when they put their homes on the market. That's especially so after 2020, a year when millions of people spent more time at home than ever before. All that time working from home and relaxing at home gave millions of homeowners ideas about what they like about their homes and what they hope to change. The following are some renovation trends that various experts suspect could emerge in 2021.

- **Eco-friendly living:** Climate change, and how to combat it, was a hot button issue during the 2020 presidential election in the United States. So it should come as no surprise that *urdesignmag.com*, a web magazine that showcases creative trends in design, architecture, art, technology, and fashion, predicts that eco-friendly living solutions figure to be hot commodities in 2021. Eco-friendly appliances, furniture and designs can help to conserve energy and reduce waste, which environmentalists and government agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency note are two critical components in the fight against climate change.

- **Large windows:** Large windows can provide stunning views of the outdoors and allow ample natural light into a home. It may not be a coincidence if large windows prove to be a hot trend in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic that dominated much of 2020 forced many people to spend considerably more time at home. Darker homes without much natural light can adversely affect mood, especially when people are spending more time at home. HGTV predicts that homeowners will seek ways to bring more natural light into their homes in 2021, and large windows naturally brighten homes while mak-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Large windows can provide stunning views of the outdoors and allow ample natural light into a home.

ing rooms appear bigger, helping people feel less cramped. That's an especially beneficial characteristic when spending more time indoors at home.

- **Minimalism:** The anticipated popularity of minimalism in 2021 may also be connected to the pandemic. As professionals were forced to work from home and many families spent more time together inside their homes than ever before, they may have recognized a need to cut back on clutter, including extra furniture. A minimalist approach is both simple and clean, which can make homes feel less claustrophobic.

- **Multi-functional spaces:** Homeowners asked a lot of their homes in 2020, as rooms were transformed into multi-functional spaces seemingly overnight. HGTV notes that spending more time at home showed homeowners that it may not make sense to dedicate entire rooms of a home to a single purpose. Renovations that can help homeowners transform rooms into multi-functional spaces figure to be hot commodities in the years ahead.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



A minimalist approach is both simple and clean, which can make homes feel less claustrophobic.

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Improve wellness with affordable bathroom upgrades

Wellness is at the forefront of nearly everyone's mind, including keeping germs at bay and creating surroundings that promote mental and physical health. Even small, but important, spaces like the bathroom can benefit from changes with wellness in mind.

A bathroom can be one of the easiest rooms in your home to give a little extra TLC toward creating a healthier lifestyle. These cost-effective measures can turn your bathroom into a more practical, functional space that promotes your well-being.

Switch Up Surfaces

The countertops in your bathroom, much like the flooring, must be able to withstand a lot of water. Nonporous vanity tops, such as those made from quartz, hold up to being wet constantly and can help keep germs from breeding. In addition to being easy to clean, a solid-surface option like quartz never needs to be sealed or polished, making it an aesthetically pleasing, long-lasting option.

Clean Green

Bathrooms are often hot and steamy places, and water vapors in the air can carry potentially harmful chemicals from cleaning products. Green cleaning products are made to control the spread of bacteria and viruses using safe and effective means. Not only are they helpful in preventing asthma attacks and other respiratory ailments, but they are a low-cost way to improve overall indoor air quality.

What you use to clean yourself is just as important. Using green or organic personal care items can help reduce toxin exposure and lessen the likelihood of an allergic reaction.

Reduce Humidity

All that steam can affect your health in other ways, too, since it creates a humid environment that encourages mold and mildew. A heated towel rack is an inexpensive way to add a touch of luxury to your space while generating heat that helps reduce humidity and the growth of mold and mildew, therefore benefiting indoor air quality.

Heated towel racks like those from Amba Products come in a variety of finishes and styles to coordinate with your decor. For modest accommodations, the Radiant Small is a space-saving choice, and freestanding models are available if wall space is at a premium. Another advantage: Since the racks dry towels, they'll stay mildew-free longer and don't need to be washed as often, which helps save valuable natural resources.

Enhance Air Quality

Creating a green, spa-like oasis with plants can bring wellness benefits that don't break the bank. Indoor plants help rid the environment of pollutants, and the energy and ambiance they add may have mental health benefits, too. Plants like mother-in-law's tongue or peace lily are popular options to incorporate as natural air purifiers.

Explore Color

A bathroom's color palette can also play a role in your wellness goals. Warmer shades like red and orange enhance energy while cooler colors like green and blue can be calming.

Begin planning bathroom upgrades that improve your health and well-being with more tips and ideas at [ambaproducts.com](https://www.ambaproducts.com).



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAMILY FEATURES/AMBA PRODUCTS

Begin planning bathroom upgrades that improve your health and well-being.

Story courtesy of Family Features/Amba Products

HOME DECOR

The many benefits of houseplants

The lines between the outdoors and indoors are being blurred. Homeowners build extensive outdoor living spaces so they can relax on weather-resistant furniture and even cook in lavish kitchens in their backyards. In addition, indoor three-season rooms full of bright, open windows that showcase outdoor vistas challenge the boundaries between outside and inside.

For those working with limited budgets, there are some easy, inexpensive ways to enjoy the majesty of natural landscapes indoors. Houseplants can be used to improve indoor spaces, and they also provide various health benefits.

Help with allergies

According to WebMD, rooms with houseplants tend to have less dust and mold in them than those without any foliage. Leaves and other parts of the plants serve as natural filters, catching airborne particles and allergens. Plants with textured leaves might be especially effective at trapping particles.

Put more oxygen into the air

The human respiratory system works by bringing in oxygen and releasing carbon dioxide. Plants do the opposite during photosynthesis. They absorb carbon dioxide and then release oxygen. Plants can put much more oxygen into the air, improving indoor conditions.

Increase indoor humidity and reduce illness

Studies from the Agricultural University of Norway found that indoor plants can increase humidity in indoor spaces, which decreases the



FILE PHOTO — MEDIANEWS GROUP

Greenery can help people feel more at home.

incidences of sore throats, dry coughs, dry skin, and the common cold. Higher absolute humidity can decrease the chances of survival and transmission of the flu virus.

Filter the air

Researchers who presented their work at the 252nd National Meeting & Exposition of the American Chemical Society found certain houseplants can combat the potentially harmful effects of volatile organic compounds. Plants may help filter out VOCs like benzene, acetone and formaldehyde, which can enter indoor air via cleaning supplies, dry-cleaned clothes, furniture, printers, and paints.

Improve interior atmosphere

Prevention magazine says plants can be used to screen unattractive areas, moderate room temperature by shading spots from the sun and even reduce noise. Plants also can improve ambiance and create a pleasing atmosphere in a room.

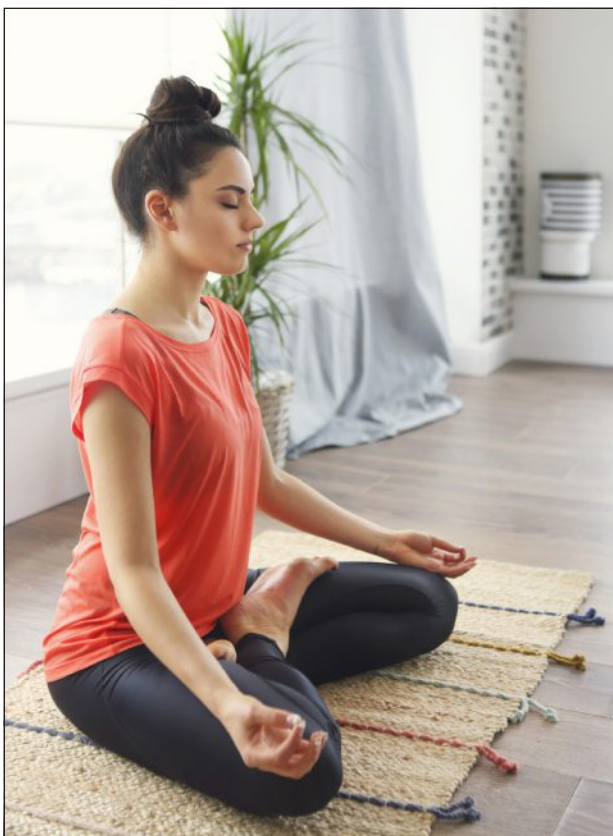


PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Plants can provide ambiance and create a pleasing atmosphere in a room.

Can improve mood

Growing and caring for plants can alleviate everyday stress. A nationwide study from UK Magazine Gardeners World found 80% of gardeners declared themselves satisfied with life compared to 67% among non-gardeners. Gardeners were more positive mentally. Greenery can help people feel more at home and improve mental health. A rehab center in Norway found patients reported a greater increase in well-being four weeks after having greenery added to their surroundings.

Houseplants can improve indoor areas and positively affect personal health.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

For those working with limited budgets, there are some easy, inexpensive ways to enjoy the majesty of natural landscapes indoors.



FILE PHOTO — MEDIANEWS GROUP

Houseplants can improve indoor areas and positively affect personal health.

HEALTH

Tips to improve indoor air quality and breathe better at home

With more of life centered at home due to cool weather and social distancing, it's time to ensure the space where your family spends the majority of its time is healthy and safe.

What many people don't know is that concentrations of air pollutants can typically be up to five times higher inside one's home than out, and sometimes far more, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. However, there are many simple actions you can take to breathe better in your home:

- **Monitor carbon monoxide:** This potentially deadly gas can be emitted by a faulty gas-burning home appliance. Monitor for carbon monoxide using detectors placed in major areas of the home, especially the bedrooms.

- **Make the switch to VOC-free:** Most paints and stains, along with aerosol sprays, air fresheners and other household products, contain Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), which emit gases that can result in respiratory problems, headaches and irritation to the eyes, nose and throat, among other health problems. Take a cue from forward-thinking institutions like the Getty Museum and Google and swap out conventional paints in your home interiors for an eco-friendly, non-toxic alternative such as ECOS Paints. The brand, which has a 35-year history of offering VOC- and odor-free paints and stains in virtually any color, uses sustainable ingredients and can deliver directly to a home



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Brush pets often — outdoors if possible — and give pets regular baths to help reduce airborne particles

or business. To learn more, visit ecospaints.net.

"We want people to feel good about what they are bringing into their homes. This is why we are transparent about ingredients and VOC testing results," says Julian Crawford, ECOS Paints CEO.

- **Keep airborne dust to a minimum:** Dust carries a variety of contaminants, including bacteria and allergens. Mop and dust often using a wet mop and dust cloth. Vacuum often as well using a vacuum with a HEPA filter, which traps small particles.

- **Eliminate moisture from the air:** Moisture promotes mold, which can cause serious health problems when left unabated. Reduce moisture by eliminating sources of water leaks, installing exhaust



It's important to ensure that the space where your family spends the majority of its time is healthy and safe.

fans in kitchens, using air conditioning, and positioning dehumidifiers in high-moisture rooms such as bathrooms, laundry rooms and basements.

- **Reduce airborne par-**

ticles: Install an air purifier to trap irritating particles, including mold, pollen and pet dander, which are particularly bad for people with respiratory problems like asthma. Brush pets



Mop and dust often using a wet mop and dust cloth to keep airborne dust to a minimum.

often — outdoors if possible — and give pets regular baths.

- **Decrease dirty air:** Replace HVAC filters regularly. While the optimal frequency that you perform this task depends on the type of filter, the number of pets at home and other factors, a good refer-

ence point is the manufacturer's guidelines.

When it comes to creating a healthy home sanctuary, taking steps to manage the most common indoor air pollutants should be a top priority.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

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