

your H HOME

4 popular paint colors
for 2022

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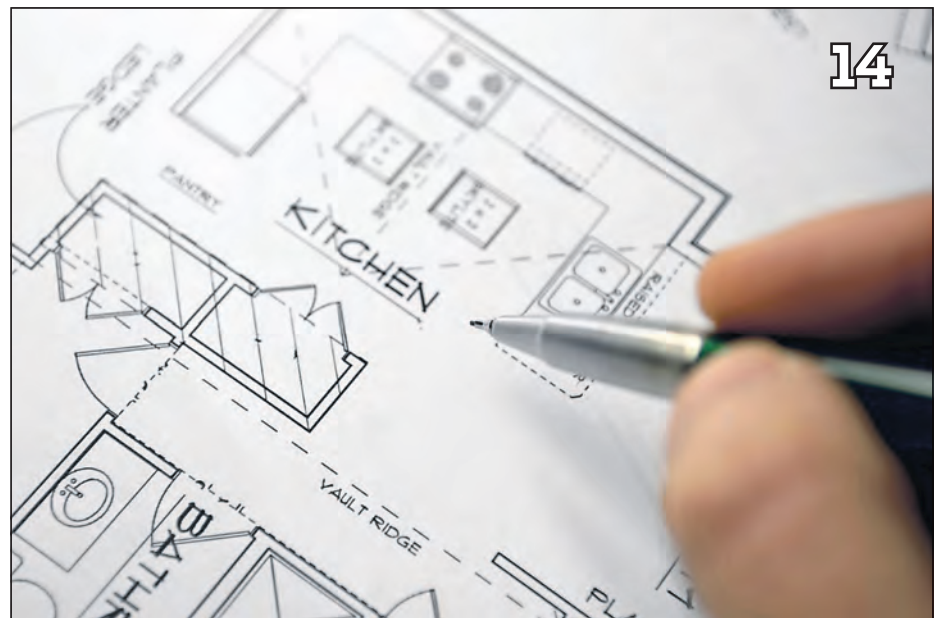
Designers' top kitchen
and bathroom trends

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HOME DECOR

Making the best of a small dining space

Some homeowners may aspire to have expansive dining rooms replete with seating for 12 beneath a stunning chandelier. That kind of space certainly makes hosting dinner parties easier. However, modern homes typically have small dining rooms that require homeowners or renters to be resourceful when entertaining guests.

Hosts may not be able to expand their dining spaces, but there are some clever ways to maximize every inch of a small dining room and even some smart solutions for those who don't have dining rooms at all.

- Create the illusion of more space. Eating areas can be made to feel larger with a few tricks. A mirror on the wall will reflect light and make the room appear larger. In addition, a large-scale patterned floor or oversized artwork on the wall may make the room appear more spacious.

- Maximize seating. Chairs can take up a lot of room in a dining space. To maximize seating availability in smaller dining rooms — or in spaces where you need to create a seating area — look to built-in banquettes or bench seating. These ideas can help create an instant cozy nook and save on space in the process.

- Let space lead furniture choices. Depending on the size and shape of the room, select a table that will fit comfortably. A round, pedestal table may take up less real estate in a smaller room than an oblong or rectangular one. Also, if you have a narrow, galley-type dining space, select a narrow table and low-profile chairs. Again, benches may work well in narrow spaces.
- Utilize the kitchen island.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Petite dining spaces can be functional when space is maximized and design tricks are called into action.



There are some clever ways to maximize every inch of a small dining room and even some smart solutions for those who don't have dining rooms at all.

Many modern homes have no dedicated dining rooms but kitchens that open up to living rooms. Homeowners with kitchen islands can utilize large islands as dining areas, and they're easy places to enjoy casual meals when stools are pulled up to the island.

- Install a drop-leaf table. Drop-leaf tables do for dining spaces what Murphy beds do for guest rooms. A wall-mounted drop-leaf table can be dropped down for entertaining and folded back

up when the space needs to be repurposed.

- Lighten up the color palette. Make dining spaces seem larger with brighter colors. Brightly colored decor, furniture and flooring can do the trick.

- Invest in storage pieces. A simple buffet can store silverware, table cloths, wine glasses, and more, but also serve double-duty as a bar or server for a buffet.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

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HOME DECOR

Key components of 3 popular home interior styles

Considerable thought goes into designing a home's interior. From which color to paint the walls to the size of the living room couch, homeowners must

make a variety of decisions when planning their home interiors.

One way to simplify interior design decisions is to choose a style. Interior de-

sign styles run the gamut from traditional to modern, and each style has its own unique look and feel. Though homeowners need not feel beholden to any

particular item associated with a given style, three of the more popular styles, traditional, modern and farmhouse, each have certain key components that

can ensure a home ends up with a look homeowners are aiming for.

1. Traditional

Homes with a traditional

interior style give a formal yet welcoming feel. Many individuals associate crown molding and wainscoting with traditional interiors, so that's something home-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Interior design styles run the gamut from traditional to modern, and each style has its own unique look and feel.

owners aiming for this style should keep in mind. Minimal or modern furniture pieces don't fit with the traditional style, which tends to utilize period pieces made from real wood.

2. Modern

Modern interiors may differ depending on which style of modern homeowners are aiming for. Midcentury modern typically features unique furnishings that some might see as retro. However, many companies now offer updated takes on midcentury modern that call to mind a bygone era but don't make individuals feel as though they're living in a museum. Urban modern is another popular modern style, and home interiors fashioned in this style tend to be light, airy and not crowded with furnishings. Calm, soft tones are a go-to with urban modern interiors, helping to create the serene settings many homeowners are hoping to create with this style.

3. Farmhouse

Farmhouse has become very popular in recent years. In fact, a recent survey from the interior design service Modsy found that farmhouse was the most popular design style in 26 states. Farmhouse is beloved for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is its association with a simpler lifestyle. The rustic charm of the countryside is never far from the mind when in a home with a farmhouse-inspired interior. Traditional farmhouse and modern farmhouse are different styles, but natural materials and bright colors, particularly white walls, are elements shared by both.

Traditional, modern and farmhouse are three popular home interior styles. Each has its own unique components, and homeowners can supplement their favored style as they see fit.



Choosing a home interior style can help simplify the design process for homeowners.



Considerable thought goes into designing a home's interior.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

HOME DECOR

4 popular paint colors for 2022



Home design trends come and go. The fleeting nature of such trends can make it hard for homeowners to commit to a particular style, especially if they want their home decor to stay as current as possible.

Paint provides one way to stay current and refresh a home's interior without investing in new furniture and home accessories. Paint trends change, but these colors are already making the rounds in 2022.

- **Very Peri:** Very Peri is the Pantone® 2022 Color of the Year. A brand new shade of blue, Very Peri was designed to rekindle some of the qualities that the color blue represents while simultaneously complementing a modern perspective. The home design pros at HGTV recommend pairing Very Peri with neutrals like taupes and creams or deeper shades like navy or brown.

- **Evergreen Fog:** The paint experts at Sherwin-Williams note that this shade of green is symbolic of nature and a color associated with revitalization and growth. Those characteristics make it great for homeowners who are looking to create a new beginning with their home interiors, particularly in relaxing spaces like living

Paint provides one way to stay current and refresh a home's interior without investing in new furniture and home accessories. Paint trends change, but these colors are already making the rounds in 2022.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHERWIN-WILLIAMS

The paint experts at Sherwin-Williams note that this shade of green is symbolic of nature and a color associated with revitalization and growth.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BEHR

Breezeway from Behr® is another popular color that provides a soft look.

rooms and bedrooms.

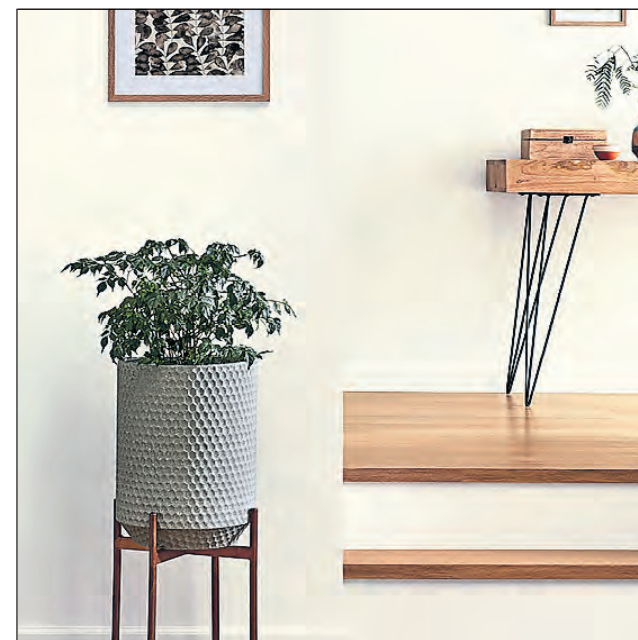
- **Breezeway:** Breezeway from Behr® is another popular color that provides a soft look. Breezeway is the Behr® Color of the Year for 2022 and is described as a silvery green shade with cool undertones. Behr® touts the versatility of Breezeway, which the company indicates inspires awe in bedrooms, living rooms or hallways. Breezeway pairs well with creamy white, taupe, softened black, and nuanced pink.

- **Gilded Linen:** Gilded Linen from Valspar® is ideal for homeowners who want a color to organize and connect spaces throughout their homes. Gilded Linen is a minimalist white that mixes well with natural elements like wood and greenery. The soft tone of Gilded Linen makes it suitable in a variety of rooms, which is one reason why it's so popular in homes with open floor plans.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PANTONE

A brand new shade of blue, Very Peri was designed to rekindle some of the qualities that the color blue represents while simultaneously complementing a modern perspective.



Gilded Linen from Valspar® is ideal for homeowners who want a color to organize and connect spaces throughout their homes.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VALSPAR

HOME MAINTENANCE

7 things to know before replacing windows

The decision to replace windows often comes down to aesthetics and necessity. Drafty windows can reduce energy efficiency in a home, requiring HVAC systems to work harder to keep interiors comfortable. The harder the HVAC must work, the more homeowners will pay in energy costs.

Old windows also may be points of entry for water and insects. Despite the importance of windows, Money magazine advises that new windows make up only a fraction of the home's total exterior "envelope," resulting in only about 5 to 15% of total energy savings.

But there are still plenty of reasons to invest in new windows.

1. Vinyl or aluminum may be best

Lumber is farmed rather quickly today and solid wood products may not stand up to elements as well as wood used a half-century ago. To avoid rot, vinyl windows often are an affordable and durable choice. Homeowners also have the option of wood windows with aluminum cladding, which are long-lasting.

2. Moisture problems indicate windows need to be replaced

Condensation that shows up as fogging between double-pane windows or on the inside of windows indicates that the windows are starting to fail. If installing a vapor barrier in the basement or crawl space, ventilating properly when showering or cooking, or using a dehumidifier indoors does not remedy the situation, it might be time to replace windows.

3. Windows add curb appeal

Beyond functionality, replacement windows immediately update the look of the home and can improve curb appeal since they are one of the most prominent features on the exterior



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Drafty windows can reduce energy efficiency in a home, requiring HVAC systems to work harder to keep interiors comfortable.

Beyond functionality, replacement windows immediately update the look of the home and can improve curb appeal.

of a home. If a house needs an update, replacing windows and can be a quick and affordable update.

4. Consider other energy-efficient upgrades

Sometimes older windows can be salvaged, especially if they are not damaged and only moderately drafty. Replacing panes, sash cords, weather stripping, and even glazing may be less expensive than replacing a window. Plus, older

homes with attractive windows complement one another. To keep energy bills down, think about adding insulation to the attic and basement — which is a good idea even if you are replacing windows.

5. The wrong windows can adversely affect home value

The National Association of Realtors says homeowners get about 73% of their replacement window investment back when they resell

a home. But choosing the wrong windows might lower the value of the home. It's important to match the look of the original windows, including window material and the divided light pattern (the number of panes in each window) with the original windows.

6. Think about soundproofing, too

When upgrading windows, also think about how certain windows can cancel out noises and make

homes more soundproof. Some windows can help reduce outdoor distractions like leaf blowers or lawn mowers.

7. Proper installation is key to longevity

Replacement windows are only as good as their installation in many cases. Poor installation and orders of standard rather than custom sized windows could result in poor fitting and seals.

Homeowners should carefully vet and review window replacement contractors to find the best professionals for the job.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



There are plenty of reasons to invest in new windows.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Converted space is only livable if the climate within the attic can be controlled so it's cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

HOME RENOVATIONS

3 factors to consider before converting an attic

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many homeowners suddenly found themselves in need of more usable square footage in their homes. Required to work from home due to social distancing recommendations, millions of working professionals suddenly found themselves setting up shop at kitchen tables or islands, in alcoves, garages, or even walk-in closets. Those makeshift offices were never supposed to be permanent, but as companies loosen workplace policies and embrace full remote or hybrid working arrangements, professionals are seeking more permanent home office solutions.

Home additions are a possibility for homeowners who need more usable square footage, but add-ons may not be the right option for everyone. If adding on won't work, homeowners may want to look up ... at their attics.

Attics with ample space can make for ideal home offices, as they're away from the hustle and bustle of a home's main floor. That can make it easier to concentrate when everyone is in the house and reduce the likelihood that video calls with colleagues and clients will be interrupted by kids and pets.

Attic conversions are not always possible, and the following are three important factors homeowners may need to consider before they can go forward with such projects.

1. Dimensions

Both the renovation experts at This Old House and the real estate experts at UpNest indicate that at least half of a finished attic must be a minimum of seven feet high and seven feet wide and 70 square feet. Requirements may differ depending on where homeowners live, but that 7-7-70 guideline is generally the minimum requirement. An attic that fails to meet such requirements won't necessarily be a lost cause, but it might be costly to make adjustments that ultimately align with

local codes.

2. Access

Access is another aspect that must adhere to local safety guidelines. Many attics are accessible only through pulldown ladders, but that will have to change if homeowners repurpose their attic spaces. A staircase that complies with local laws will need to be installed, and contractors can work with homeowners to build that and estimate the cost. Homeowners who simply want to put desks in their attics without going with full-fledged conversions are urged to adhere to local access requirements anyway, as they're intended to ensure residents can safely escape attics in the case of a fire or another emergency.

3. Climate control

Attics are converted to provide residents with more livable space. Converted space is only livable if the climate within the attic can be controlled so it's cool in the summer and warm in the winter. An existing HVAC unit needs to efficiently heat and cool an extra room. If it can't, bills might spike because the rest of the home likely won't be as comfortable, forcing homeowners to adjust thermostats to offset that discomfort. That also could affect the unit's life expectancy.

Before going forward with an attic renovation, homeowners should contact HVAC professionals to determine if attic spaces can be serviced with the existing units and ductwork, or if an alternative arrangement must be worked out to make the spaces livable.

Attic conversions can be great ways to make existing spaces more livable. Homeowners considering such projects should pay attention to three important variables as they try to determine if attic conversions will work for them.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Attic conversions can be great ways to make existing spaces more livable.

HOME MAINTENANCE

Signs of pest infestation at home

Pests come in many shapes and sizes, from the smallest of insects that crawl through crevices or under moldings to larger mammals that find their way into attics and basements. Taking care of a home or buying a new one can be stressful enough without having to contend with a potential pest infestation.

Much like any other home issue, like a leak or faulty electrical system, pests can cause significant damage if left unchecked. Furthermore, the droppings left from certain creatures can compromise human health. For example, National Exterminating says rodents can spread hantavirus, while droppings from other pests can exacerbate asthma and allergies.

The best way to stay ahead of potential pest problems is to recognize signs that pests are present.

Droppings

A classic sign of infestation, pet waste includes fecal droppings or urine trails. Certain waste is easier to spot than others. For example, bed bug droppings are much smaller than mice or rat droppings. Homeowners can carry out thorough examinations of furniture, bedding,

walls, floors, and areas of the home that get little foot traffic to look for pests.

Dead bodies

Another sign that points to pests is the presence of dead insect or animal bodies. A large number is indicative of a pest problem.

Active pests

The experts at Batzner Pest Control say that live animals or insects in and around the home are potential signs of infestation. Most are very good at hiding, so finding live specimens may require some investigating in the kitchen, bathrooms and outdoors near the perimeter of the home.

Evidence of nesting

Most animals want somewhere cozy and comfortable to bed down and will use materials available to them when making nests. Look for shredded paper, feathers, gathered twigs or grasses, home insulation piles, or any other red flags that could be nests.

Smells, sights and sounds

Animals and insects can give off smells and make sounds. Roaches are said to have an “oily” odor, while mice may produce “musty” smells. Homeowners may hear gnawing, squeaking, scurrying, or scratching. In addition, there may be holes, gnaw marks, signs of burrows, and other signs of pests. Wood shavings or sawdust could indicate the presence of termites, which cause serious structural damage.

Stored pesticides

People who are viewing a potential new home and find cans and canisters of pesticides or pest traps should recognize that there is likely a problem with animals or insects there.

Pests can be a concern for homeowners, who can overcome the issue after learning to identify signs of their presence.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Live animals or insects in and around the home are potential signs of infestation.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Pests can be a concern for homeowners, who can overcome the issue after learning to identify signs of their presence.



Even avid do-it-yourselfers can sometimes benefit from a contractor's expertise, particularly for complex tasks.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

HOME RENOVATIONS

How to cut costs on home renovations

Do you still have an avocado green kitchen? Is your living room dank and dark? Perhaps there is only one bathroom for a family of six? Answering yes to any of these questions could serve as the catalyst for a home renovation project.

Home improvement projects come in all shapes and sizes — some with huge budgets and others that are more cost-conscious. Regardless of what homeowners hope to achieve with their renovations, a common goal across any price point is a desire to save as much money as possible. Home renovations can be expensive, but there are ways to cut costs.

- Assess the merit of the project. Remodeling magazine annually publishes a “Cost vs. Value Report” that lists the average cost and return on investment homeowners can expect of various types of projects. If you’re planning to sell your home soon, it may be best to focus on repairs and renovations that will generate the most substantial ROI.

- Hire a contractor. Even avid do-it-yourselfers can sometimes benefit from a contractor’s expertise, particularly for complex tasks. Don’t waste money by trying tough jobs yourself; rely on an experienced contractor who can get supplies for less money and will do the job right the first time. Compare bids from several different contractors and figure out the best value.

- Refurbish existing features. Rather than a complete gut and rebuild, figure out where you can revitalize existing fixtures and more. For example, refinishing existing cabinets can save you up to 50% compared with the cost of new cabinetry, according to Angi (formerly Angie’s List), a cost compar-

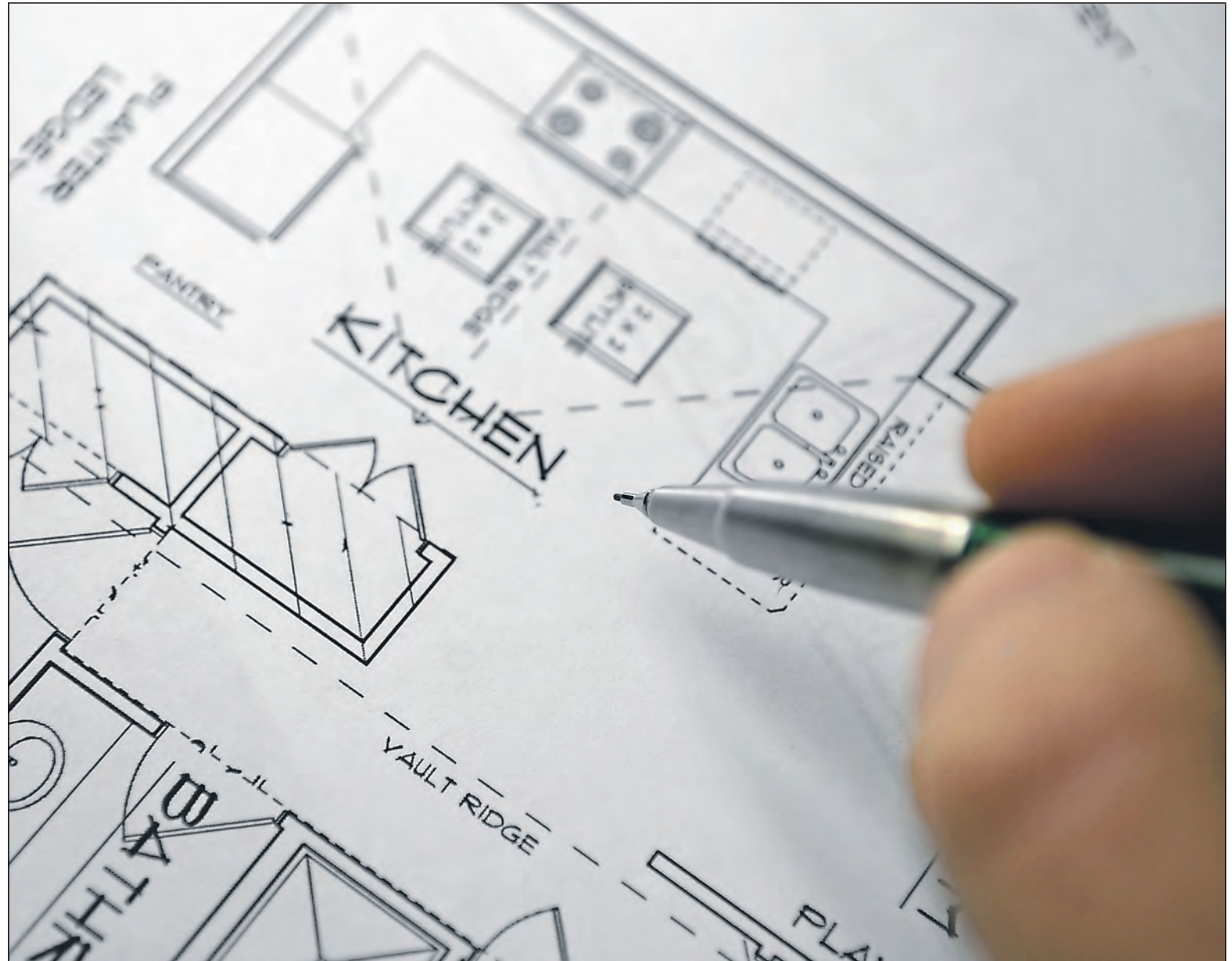


PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Rather than a complete gut and rebuild, figure out where you can revitalize existing fixtures and more.

ison and business review resource.

- Choose mid-grade materials. Certain materials may be all the rage but they come with a higher price tag. Angi reports that granite counters could be \$60 to \$100 per square foot. However, a composite or laminate that looks like granite

and wears well may be \$10 to 40 per square foot. Figure out where you can choose middle-of-the-road materials for maximum value.

- Avoid peak seasons. You’ll pay more to install a deck or a pool right before the outdoor entertaining season. There also may be a premium to get work

done right before a major holiday. Therefore, consult the calendar to find an off time for a renovation and book it then to save.

- Do some prep work. You might be able to save by doing some of the demolition and preparatory work yourself. For example, you can tear up old carpeting be-

fore the installation of new tile floors. Perhaps you can mend and patch up walls before a paint job.

- Buy a display item. Former showroom kitchens and baths often are sourced at a fraction of their recommended retail prices, according to Real Homes, a home remodel guide based

in the United Kingdom. Retailers often update their displays and you may score existing showroom items at a discount.

Renovations can be expensive, but there are many different ways to cut costs.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Low-cost ways to revamp living areas

Home improvement projects require substantial financial investment. But just because a homeowner wants to bring a fresh look indoors doesn't mean he or she has to break the bank along the way.

Living rooms are some of the most frequently used spaces in a home, and they can use an update from time to time to stay on trend or to make the area more functional for a changing family dynamic. Here are some budget-friendly ideas for breathing new life into living room designs.

- **Establish the budget.** Homeowners should figure out how many dollars they can designate to a living room makeover before purchasing supplies or hiring out the work. Figure out the scope of the remodel, visit stores or suppliers to price out materials, get estimates from contractors, and then plan for some unforeseen circumstances along the way to determine if this type of renovation is affordable. If not, scale things back until the project more closely aligns with your budget.

- **Change the paint color.** Lighter and brighter colors are on trend. A can or two of paint can do wonders for updating a space without a large financial commitment. Pair that new paint color with new window coverings and complementary throw pillows to pull the theme together with minimal expense.

- **Update the flooring.** Tired, outdated carpeting or other flooring can use an overhaul. While solid hardwood flooring may be preferable, there are many types of laminate flooring that mimic the looks of popular wood colors and styles for a fraction of the cost. Plus, many are sold at home improvement retailers and even at warehouse clubs or online for reasonable prices. Laminate flooring also may be a potential DIY job for a skilled homeowner, saving even more money.

- **Introduce a fireplace.** Fireplaces were once hot commodities, but that popularity waned in



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Living rooms are some of the most frequently used spaces in a home, and they can use an update from time to time to stay on trend.

the 1970s and 1980s. Homeowners with chimneys may discover a fireplace was boarded over and the bare bones still exist that can be renovated to bring back character. There also are ventless freestanding units that are quite affordable that can mimic the look of a built-in fireplace.

- **Reupholster instead of replace furniture.** There's no need to throw away quality furniture if the fabric is the only thing impeding design. New upholstery or even a slipcover can update designs.

- **Conquer clutter.** Rather than adding something to the living room, remove clutter to give the room a more airy feel. This can

instantly change the look of the room. Use cord covers to tame plugs for electronics and remove unnecessary furniture from the room.

- **Improve lighting.** Another easy and often inexpensive fix is to change lighting fixtures, including using brighter, more energy efficient LED bulbs, and to assess lighting needs to eliminate dark corners of rooms that can make the space seem drab.

Living room spaces in need of an update often can benefit from improvements that go easy on the wallet.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Fireplaces were once hot commodities, but that popularity waned in the 1970s and 1980s.



Lighter and brighter colors are on trend.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION



It's hard to beat hardwood when it comes to aesthetic appeal.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

HOME RENOVATIONS

Popular kitchen flooring materials

Kitchens have long been considered the most popular gathering spaces in a home. That popularity compels millions of homeowners to renovate their kitchens each year, and the return on those investments is often significant.

A number of variables, including the value of neighboring homes and how quickly homeowners sell their homes after a renovation, affect the return on investment with a given project. According to Remodeling magazine's "2021 Cost vs. Value Report," homeowners recouped roughly 72% of their investment in a minor kitchen remodel at resale. That's a sizable return that outperformed other popular upgrades, including vinyl siding re-

placement and wood deck additions. When renovating kitchens, homeowners will have to consider various components within the room, including the floors. Average flooring costs can be hard to calculate because they depend so heavily on homeowners' choice of materials. The following are some popular flooring materials that homeowners can consider as they plan to renovate their kitchens.

- Vinyl. Vinyl flooring is popular thanks in large part to its cost. According to the home remodeling experts at HomeAdvisor, vinyl flooring installation is much less costly than other types of flooring. But its budget-friendliness is not the only benefit of vi-

nyl flooring, which HGTV notes is easy to clean, making it an ideal choice for families that routinely confront spills and stains. HomeAdvisor notes that vinyl is the best waterproof material among all kitchen floors.

- Porcelain/ceramic tile. HomeAdvisor reports that the average cost to install porcelain or ceramic tile flooring is between \$885 and \$2,994. That's less than the average cost to install stone or wood flooring. Porcelain or ceramic tiles can be slippery when they get wet, though HGTV notes that some porcelain flooring tiles have been certified as slip-resistant by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

- Hardwood. It's hard to beat

hardwood when it comes to aesthetic appeal. Hardwood can be especially suitable in homes with open-concept floor plans that already have hardwood floors in surrounding rooms. HomeAdvisor notes that hardwood flooring installation can be costly, which might make it a less realistic option for budget-conscious homeowners. According to HGTV, engineered wood planks may be something to consider in the kitchen, as these are designed to be less susceptible to humidity and temperature. That's an important component to consider in the kitchen, where temperatures can fluctuate while meals are being prepared.

- Stone. Natural stone tile is

another popular kitchen flooring material. HomeAdvisor traces that popularity to its wide variety of styles and price points, which make it a realistic option for homeowners working with budgets big and small. Stone tiles also provide a unique look because no two look the same, which might appeal to homeowners who want their kitchen floors to create a one-of-a-kind impression.

Kitchen flooring materials vary widely. That variety ensures there's a material for any style and budget homeowners are working with.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Kitchen flooring materials vary widely. That variety ensures there's a material for any style and budget homeowners are working with.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Missing granules and missing shingles are reasons to consult a pro for a roof evaluation.

HOME MAINTENANCE

Signs a roof needs repair or replacement

Many homeowners believe a roof is a once-in-a-lifetime investment. But roof damage can force homeowners to replace a roof regardless of how much time has lapsed since the roof was installed.

The average life span of a roof depends on when the roof was installed and the materials it is made from. According to Central Homes Roofing, three-tab shingles may last between 10 and 15 years, architectural shingles can endure for 15 to 20 years, and tile may last between 35 and 50 years. RPS Metal Roofing indicates a metal roof may last as long as 70 years. However, climate and color of the roof also will affect its longevity.

Homeowners would be wise to consider these factors when determining if a roof is in need of repairs or replacement.

- **Roof age.** The age of the roof is a major factor in determining if it will need to be replaced or if repairs can be made to isolated damage. Individuals who live in neighborhoods where neighbors are now replacing roofs will likely find it is time to consult a roofing company. Homeowners also can check to see if they have any receipts that indicate the roof's installation date so they have an idea about its age.

The average life span of a roof depends on when the roof was installed and the materials it is made from.

- **Grain in gutters.** Roofing shingles are designed to overlap, and sealant keeps them steady. Friction, weather and atmospheric changes can impact sealant and cause degradation. Gutters with grainy material in them could indicate worn out sealant and shingles.

- **Ridge damage.** Ridges are spots where two separate areas meet and often are important to the structural integrity of the roof. If the roof ridge is showing signs of

wear, it could be time to repair or replace it.

- **Curled shingle edges.** If shingle tabs are curled or cupped, the shingles may need to be replaced. But if curling is extensive, a whole new roof may need to be installed.

- **Bald spots or lost portions of the roof.** Missing granules and missing shingles are reasons to consult a pro for a roof evaluation.

- **Leaks indoors.** Homeowners who find dark streaks or moisture in the attic may discover that water is penetrating the roof underlay. Water often comes in around chimney flashing. Other water signs are blistering and bubbling in walls.

- **Incoming light.** Look up through the attic and see if any light is coming through the roof, which may indicate there are cracks or holes in the roof.

- **Aesthetics.** If a homeowner doesn't like the look of the roof from a design standpoint, a replacement also may be warranted.

Roofs can last many years, but the presence of certain signs indicates replacement or repairs will be necessary.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Roofs can last many years, but the presence of certain signs indicates replacement or repairs will be necessary.

HOME ORGANIZATION

Tips to organize your cluttered kitchen



Invest in one type of storage container so you can nest the containers and lids for ultimate organization.

Kitchens serve as the heart of many homes. Thanks to the popularity of open floor plans, kitchens also tend to be highly visible from nearby spaces, such as family rooms and even main entryways. A messy, cluttered kitchen can be an inefficient eyesore that's visible from various locations in a home. That makes getting organized in the kitchen a worthwhile goal.

The following are some tips to help homeowners organize their kitchens.

Start with the utensils

Utensils come in all shapes and sizes. Take inventory of your utensils, discarding or donating items you don't use. Next, designate drawers or countertop storage solutions for the utensils you use most often. Place them within easy reach, and take into account your dominant hand for placement.

Categorize your pantry

Empty the pantry, paying attention to staples you regularly use. Then figure out a system for categorization that works for your household. Perhaps place all baking essentials together, such as flour, oil, baking soda, and cocoa powder. Maybe you need to designate a "kids corner" in the pantry

where you keep fruit snacks, granola bars and breakfast cereals. Use uniformly shaped containers to store packaged foods so you're not contending with oddly shaped boxes and bags.

Use extra wall or ceiling space

Large pots and pans can eat up cabinet space or clutter the inside of an oven for those who don't have any other space. While your decorative enamel Dutch oven might fit nicely on a shelf or counter, cast-iron pans and skillets can be hung from durable hooks over an island or near the stove.

Organize under the sink

It can be difficult to keep cleaning products tidy and within reach. Try installing a short tension rod inside the cabinet and use it to hang spray bottles, rubber gloves and cleaning cloths.

Use kitchen cabinet rollouts

A shortage of storage space in cabinets can be remedied with rollouts. They provide additional capacity to cabinets and make it easier to find items, instead of having to dig at the back of dim cabinet recesses.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A shortage of storage space in cabinets can be remedied with rollouts.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Kitchens serve as the heart of many homes, making getting organized in the kitchen a worthwhile goal.

Tame your container collection

It's tempting to save all of those take-out containers or empty margarine tubs for leftovers. But if there's an avalanche every time you open up a cabinet to reach for a container, you probably have too many. Invest in one type of storage container so you can nest the containers and lids for ultimate organization.

An organized kitchen is more attainable than it may seem. Some simple strategies can help homeowners make these home hubs less cluttered and more calming.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

Right: Designate drawers or countertop storage solutions for the utensils you use most often.



Designate drawers or countertop storage solutions for the utensils you use most often. Place them within easy reach, and take into account your dominant hand for placement.



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Before throwing out old “junk,” determine if it’s valuable.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

HOME ORGANIZATION

Spring cleaning: Is your 'junk' worth a fortune?

If your family is like most, you have “junk” in your basement, garage or attic, such as sports cards, memorabilia and toys. Before you toss them out during spring cleaning, consider that the prices of sports cards, games and other ephemera are skyrocketing.

How can you determine if your stuff is valuable and, if it is, how can you sell it?

A widely accepted rule for sports cards, memorabilia and toys is that older items are worth more. However, these days even more recent items are also commanding high prices.

“Vintage sports cards from the early periods of a sport are almost always highly collectible, especially of Hall of Famers,” says Al Crisafulli, Auction Director at Love of the Game Auctions, an internet sports and memorabilia auction that helps families sell collectibles. “But don’t assume sports cards or other memorabilia have to be old to be valuable.

Modern cards of such stars as Tom Brady, Mike Trout, LeBron James, Michael Jordan, Derek Jeter and others can sell for lots of money.”

He is offering tips to help determine if your belongings are valuable:

Older Sports Cards

Cards from the 1960s and earlier are collectible, and those from before the 1940s can be extremely valuable. Big-name Hall of Famers like Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Lou Gehrig, Honus Wagner, Mickey Mantle and others bring high prices.

With old cards from the 1880s and early 1900s, look for tobacco and candy brands, such as Old Judge, Piedmont, Sweet Caporal or American Caramel. Really old Sports memorabilia from the 19th and early 20th Century, such as photographs, postcards, bats, gloves and balls are also collectible.

When opting to sell sports items, consider a specialty auction, such as Love

of the Game, which has the expertise to professionally research sports items and maintains lists of bidders specializing in this area, to get top dollar. More information is available at loveofthegameauctions.com.

Modern Cards

Prices on recent baseball, basketball and football cards have risen rapidly. The three keys are condition, star power and cards from early in player careers.

Do you have major current stars, like Mike Trout, Patrick Mahomes, Tom Brady and LeBron James? Or do you have greats from the recent past, like Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, Magic Johnson, Derek Jeter or Joe Montana?

Check if your cards are denoted as Rookie, Prospect, Draft Pick or other indicators they’re from a player’s first season. And condition is king, as cards that look pack fresh with sharp corners and

a well-centered image command high prices. Additionally, unopened packs and boxes from almost any year can be valuable.

Memorabilia

Do you have old advertising posters depicting sports stars or famous entertainment personalities together with food, tobacco or sporting goods brands. Many original signs, store displays and promotional items are collectible, especially those dating from the early 1900s into the 1960s. But low-quality reproductions aren’t. Look for memorabilia spotlighting sports heroes, superheroes, early Walt Disney characters and Star Wars subjects.

So, while you’re spring cleaning that attic, basement or garage, don’t rush to the garbage. Before throwing out old “junk,” determine if it’s valuable!

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



CHRIS MCGRATH — GETTY IMAGES

Prices on recent baseball, basketball and football cards have risen rapidly. The three keys are condition, star power and cards from early in player careers.

HOME DECOR

How to choose the best wallpaper design for any space



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

To take the guesswork out of wallpaper design selection, consider heading to a wallpaper digital marketplace.

Thinking about using wallpaper to transform your walls from drab to fab? You're in good company. Wallpaper's popularity is on the rise in both residential and commercial spaces and gaining an edge over paint.

Why? Experts believe this trend reflects a growing recognition of wallpaper's unique benefits. It's cost-effective, protects the wall surface from accidental marks and scratches, and offers personalized self-expression at a reasonable price.

"We experienced consistent month-over-month wallpaper sales increases throughout 2021. We attribute this to consumers' growing desire to customize their spaces with designs that reflect their personal style and aesthetic preferences, while retaining the option to change things up as frequently as desired

with removable wallpaper," says Michael Jones, general manager, Spoonflower, a leading custom, print-on-demand wallpaper and home decor digital marketplace.

According to Jones, there are a few things to keep in mind when choosing the right wallpaper for your space. Here, he offers a few insights to help you get started:

Type

First, determine how long you'd like the wallpaper to remain on your walls. Some types of wallpaper are more suitable for long-term use and others are best for those who wish to change their designs with the seasons or on a whim. For this reason, Spoonflower offers three types of wallpaper:

1. **Prepasted Removable Smooth:** Long-lasting, but fully removable (and recy-

clable), this option is great for homes, rental spaces, accent walls or temporary art installations.

2. **Peel and Stick Removable Woven:** Removable and repositionable, this option won't leave a residue behind. Whether you're renting or you love to stay on-trend, temporary wallpaper is a great alternative to traditional wall coverings.

3. **Traditional Pebble:** This traditional wallpaper has a subtle leathery texture, matte finish, is paste-activated and is highly durable. Not only is it PVC-free, it is also moisture resistant.

Design

To take the guesswork out of wallpaper design selection, consider heading to a wallpaper digital marketplace. In the case of Spoonflower, which features over 1 million designs,



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMIE SHERMAN

Before committing, consider ordering two or three swatches so you can compare them in your own space and assess the best fit.

the biggest challenge you'll face is the enormity of selection. However, you can easily narrow down your choices by searching for designs based on category keywords, color or by styles, such as Mid-Century Modern, Cottagecore or Paisley. For those with a specific design already envisioned, the site even allows you to up-

load your own design and have it custom printed on wallpaper.

Before committing, consider ordering two or three swatches so you can compare them in your own space and assess the best fit. This can help ensure your final design selection is completely tailored to your preferences. To learn more and

to get the process started, visit [spoonflower.com](https://www.spoonflower.com).

Thanks to new wallpaper technology and an ever-growing library of designs available, making a customized impact on the look and feel of your spaces has never been easier.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMIE SHERMAN

"Wallpaper offers homeowners the opportunity to give their home a more personalized look, and at a reasonable price."



PHOTO COURTESY OF BETHANY SY OF REALITY DAYDREAM

Wallpaper's popularity is on the rise in both residential and commercial spaces and gaining an edge over paint.

HOME FINANCING

Cash-out refinancing and HELOCs are expected to surge in 2022. But are they right for you?

By Michele Lerner

Special To The Washington Post

If you're feeling house rich, you're not alone.

Skyrocketing home values in 2021 mean that homeowners across the United States gained new wealth through their properties, with an average increase in equity of nearly \$57,000 per mortgage borrower from the third quarter of 2020 to the third quarter of 2021, according to property data analytics firm CoreLogic.

That represents an annual increase of 31.1%, the largest average gain in more than 11 years and three times the pre-pandemic gain in equity between the third quarter of 2019 and the third quarter of 2020.

"Homeowners have an enormous amount of home equity wealth driven by double-digit home price growth," says Frank Nothaft, chief economist of Irvine, Calif.-based CoreLogic. "In high-cost housing markets, the amount of equity gained has been higher than the national average, going up to as much as \$119,000 in California, for example."

As a result of increased home values, lenders and real estate data analysts say that cash-out refinancing, which allows borrowers to take out some of their home equity with a new mortgage, increased in 2021. That growth is anticipated to continue in 2022.

"I think it's inevitable that we'll see more cash-out refinancing in 2022 because homeowners have experienced continual home equity growth over almost the past 10 years," says Rick

Sharga, executive vice president of RealtyTrac, a division of Attom, a property data and analytics firm based in Irvine. "We've also seen a trend that homeowners are staying in their homes longer, especially baby boomers who want to age in place. Instead of selling after three to five years like people did a decade ago, homeowners are more likely to tap into their equity to remodel."

Mortgage rates are anticipated to increase in 2022, which Sharga says means lenders may need to market cash-out refinancing as a way to offset a lower number of purchase loans and traditional refinances.

"I expect we'll see some lenders target their marketing to making home improvements and paying off credit card debt or student loan debt with a refinance," Sharga says. "They may offer lower rates, lower points on the loan and lower closing costs as incentives."

Paul Buege, president and chief operating officer of Inlanta Mortgage in Menomonee Falls, Wis., says about 50% of refinances completed by his company were cash-out refinances during the third and fourth quarters of 2021. Most were homeowners using the funds to make home improvements.

"We closed 33% more cash-out refinance loans in 2021 compared to 2020 and we expect that growth to be sustained in 2022," says John W. Mallett, founder of MainStreet Mortgage and author of "Buy Your First Home Today," who is based in Westlake Village, Calif. "While there are lots of homeowners who see their home value rising and want



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

As a result of increased home values, lenders and real estate data analysts say that cash-out refinancing increased in 2021. That growth is anticipated to continue in 2022.

to pay off their loan even faster before they retire, some want to take out cash to fix up their house and make it better. Others have debt they want to pay off to improve their finances."

The two most popular options for tapping into your home equity are a cash-out refinance or a home equity line of credit, known as a HELOC.

"Tappable home equity" refers to your home equity above 20%. Most lenders today will only loan a maximum of 80% in your home's equity, although a few may allow a loan-to-value of 85% for borrowers with excellent credit and a strong fi-

ancial history. For example, if your house is worth \$500,000, you can borrow up to \$400,000. If you owe \$350,000, you could increase your balance and take out up to \$50,000 if you qualify for a cash-out refinance.

"Many homeowners today have 30% or 40% or more in home equity because of the rapid increase in home values," Nothaft says.

A cash-out refinance replaces your existing loan with a new mortgage at a larger balance than is owed on the house, with the difference paid in cash, says Sean Grzebin, head of con-

sumer originations for Chase Home Lending, who is based in Jacksonville, Fla.

However, a cash-out refinance typically has a slightly higher interest rate than a traditional refinance. Borrowers pay closing costs and fees and are likely to have higher mortgage payments because of the larger loan balance.

"A cash-out refinance replaces an existing mortgage, whereas a HELOC exists as a separate loan, creating a second lien on the property," Grzebin says. "Some consumers may opt for a cash-out refinance instead of a HELOC to avoid

having multiple liens on their home.

Moreover, customers choosing a cash-out refinance will have just one payment that is generally a fixed rate vs. a variable rate. It's also fully amortized, meaning there is no balloon payment expected after 10 years, which many HELOCs have. Taken together, these features can make a cash-out refinance an option that customers may find more predictable and easier to manage than a HELOC.

A HELOC often carries a higher interest rate than a refinance because it is a second loan and therefore con-

sidered riskier by lenders. Borrowers usually pay little to nothing in fees for a HELOC and can use as much or as little of the line of credit as they want. Payments are only required on the amount of the HELOC used.

“One caveat about HELOCs is that when home values dropped after the housing crisis, many lenders shut down homeowners’ lines of credit,” Sharga says. “There’s no expectation that prices will drop that way again, but there’s always a possibility that it could happen.”

A HELOC typically has an adjustable interest rate and requires borrowers to only pay the interest on the debt for 10 years. Borrowers can experience payment shock at the end of that time when they must pay both principal and interest and could be paying a higher interest rate, Mallett says.

One concern about an increase in cash-out refinancing is the possibility of another housing crisis similar to 2007-2008 when millions of Americans lost their homes in a foreclosure or short sale.

“An underreported aspect of the mortgage meltdown was the role of cash-out refinancing in the high number of foreclosures,” RealtyTrac’s Sharga says. “Borrowers used their homes as an ATM to pay for daily expenses, vacations and cars, so when values dropped, they were deeper underwater on their mortgages.”

Today, most lenders only allow homeowners to borrow up to 80% of their home’s value, so they keep 20% in home equity.

“You don’t see loans for 100% of the home value anymore,” Sharga says. “Whether it’s because of new regulations, lessons learned or a combination of both, lenders are far more conservative than they were before the housing crisis.”

Unlike before the housing crisis, lenders are re-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A cash-out refinance typically has a slightly higher interest rate than a traditional refinance.

quired to fully document every mortgage application to ensure the borrowers can repay the loan, Buege says.

“Everyone must qualify for a cash-out refinance based on their credit score and their debt-to-income ratio,” Buege says. Your debt-to-income ratio compares the minimum monthly payment on all recurring debt to your gross income. “Lenders use much more disciplined credit standards today.”

In addition, CoreLogic’s Nothaft points out, the housing market is far different now than it was leading up to the Great Recession.

“In 2006 we had an overbuilt housing market and builders were continuing to add supply,” Nothaft says. “Today, we are severely underbuilt and have generationally low vacancy rates for all types of housing. That will sustain prices so we’re far less likely to see a drop in home values.”

Still, some lenders continue to be wary about the overuse of home equity, particularly for debt con-

solidation.

“Cash-out refinancing can be addictive,” Main-Street Mortgage’s Mallett says. “It’s easy to see that if you have \$50,000 in credit card at a high interest rate you can improve your cash flow by paying it off with cash from your house. But some people are tempted to go out and take on more credit card debt.”

However, regulations and lender concerns about a repeat of the foreclosure crisis make it far more difficult today to repeatedly take equity from your home.

For many homeowners, cash-out refinancing offers an option to pay for home improvements that could result in a higher home value and a better quality of life.

“One reason for the increase in cash-out refinancing is the time everyone has been spending in their homes during the past couple of years,” Buege says. “People are taking cash out of their homes to improve their work-from-home setup and their outdoor space.”

says. Generally, a debt-to-income ratio of 45% or lower is also required.

“Compared to a standard refinance, cash-out refinances typically require a higher credit score and lower loan-to-value ratio to ensure a customer’s ability to repay the loan with higher monthly mortgage payments,” Grzebin, of Chase, says. A loan-to-value ratio compares your loan balance with your appraised home value. Some lenders refinance loans with a ratio higher than 80% if the borrowers are not tapping their home equity.

Any homeowner considering a cash-out refinance or a HELOC should consult a lender to discuss the pros and cons of all their options, Buege says.

“Home equity is a significant source of financial security and intergenerational wealth,” Sharga says. “Just because you have it doesn’t mean that you need to use it. Consumers need to think twice about taking out their equity, especially because it can be an important part of their retirement.”

The pandemic’s uneven impact on people left many homeowners equity rich but cash poor. Some homeowners who lost their jobs and lost family members who shared expenses continue to struggle financially but cannot qualify for a cash-out refinance because of a lower credit score or the inability to qualify to make payments on a new loan.

One option for some of these borrowers is a shared equity arrangement from companies such as Hometap, Unison and Unlock. Unlike a cash-out refinance or a home equity line of credit, a home equity share agreement allows homeowners to take out cash from their home equity without payments or interest accruing. In exchange, the investor will be repaid with a portion of the home’s equity when the homeown-

ers sell, buy out the investor or the agreement ends.

“A shared home equity agreement gives homeowners an opportunity to access their equity even if they have a credit score as low as 500,” says Michael Micheletti, head of communications for Unlock. “This isn’t a loan, so there aren’t any payments either. Most of our customers are using the money to wipe out their other debts and get in a better cash flow position.”

Investors in shared equity agreements gain access to residential real estate without actually becoming a landlord, Micheletti says.

“Most of our homeowner customers expect to refinance within a year or two after their financial situation stabilizes and their credit score improves,” he says. “They can buy back their equity when they refinance or sell their home. They can also buy it back in increments.”

At Unlock, homeowners are evaluated monthly to make sure they are making their mortgage payments. To protect investors and homeowners, all liens on the property such as for unpaid taxes or homeowner association dues must be paid with some of the equity initially taken from the home. In some cases, especially for borrowers with a credit score under 550, other debts must also be directly paid from the equity share.

“We want to secure the house from foreclosure for the investors and the homeowners,” Micheletti says.

Alternative financing arrangements such as shared equity agreements are largely unregulated so far, Sharga says.

“While they offer an opportunity for homeowners to tap into their equity who might not otherwise be able to do so, consumers need to approach these with their eyes wide open to make sure they understand the consequences of the agreement,” he says.



While planning ahead may take time, it is essential to ensuring successful completion of a renovation project.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

HOME RENOVATIONS

Planning ahead is vital to a successful renovation

Remodeling projects are significant undertakings. Homeowners must consider a host of variables before any such project can begin. While planning ahead may take time, it is essential to ensuring successful completion of a renovation project. Consider these pre-renovation planning pointers to help any job go smoothly.

Determine your motivation for renovating

Renovation projects often involve balancing needs and wants, and determining if a project is a necessity or a luxury can set the timeline and course of the project. Is the roof leaking? If so, immedi-

ate action is necessary. Could the kitchen be a bit more functional? If the kitchen is still manageable, a homeowner may be able to wait a little bit to get better prices on appliances or contracting services. Separating needs from wants helps homeowners map out a viable timeline that maximizes productivity and affordability.

Get professional advice

Many homeowners are under the impression that doing the work themselves can save a considerable amount of money. This may be the case for homeowners with renovation experience. But by and large, professional contractors are an asset to any ren-

ovation. They can provide a realistic overview of the project, map out projected costs, point out areas that could be troublesome, and may have industry contacts that can keep supply costs low. Even if a homeowner will do a portion of the job, a contractor can do the bulk of the work and keep the project on budget.

Get necessary permits

Permits are designed to ensure the work is being done to code and in a safe manner. However, they are not without additional costs and processing time, and that can cause some homeowners to skip this step. According to the home information site The Spruce,

building permits cost anywhere from \$400 to about \$2,200 for new home construction. Building permits for smaller projects can cost \$100 or less, and typically are based on a percentage of the anticipated cost of the project.

A permit may be issued the day the application is submitted, while other cities and towns may issue permits up to two or more weeks later. Factor permit fees and processing times into the renovation plan.

If it comes to light a homeowner did work without a required permit, he or she may face penalties; may have to tear out work done to have it inspected or redone; some may be unable to sell a home un-

til permits have been obtained and work has been done to code. Homeowners insurance coverage also may be affected if homeowners do not obtain the proper permits.

Other considerations when planning a renovation include writing out a strict budget, gathering inspiration, drawing up to-scale renovation plans, pouring over material reviews, and getting recommendations for reliable professionals to do the job. While not every obstacle can be avoided, planning is a good way to start successfully.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Renovation projects often involve balancing needs and wants, and determining if a project is a necessity or a luxury can set the timeline and course of the project.

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Easy ways to make your household more Earth-friendly

Is it time to green up your act at home? Here are just a few tweaks you can make to substantially reduce your environmental footprint.

Make Appliance Upgrades

Home appliances are improving all the time, with many newer models designed specifically with efficiency in mind. If your home appliances, such as your washer, dryer, dishwasher, refrigerator and HVAC system, are on the older side, it may be time to replace one or more of these items. Over time, you'll offset the upfront cost with reduced energy bills. Plus, you'll be helping protect the climate. Look for ENERGY STAR-rated products, which have met strict EPA standards.

Optimize Heating and Cooling

North American Technician Excellence (NATE) offers the following energy-saving tips to help you keep your home comfort system running at peak performance:

- Change your air filters monthly, or as directed by the manufacturer.
- Add weatherstripping and caulk around windows and doors to improve your home's insulation. Improperly insulated walls, floors, attics, basements and crawlspaces waste energy and can also lead to moisture imbalance.
- Install a programmable thermostat to help regulate temperatures.
- Don't keep clutter near your HVAC units, and don't store anything next to them that could impede ventilation. Likewise, keep vents and returns free of obstructions. Don't lay carpet over vents, place furniture over or in front of them, or obstruct airflow.
- Dry air feels cooler than moist air. A simple humidifier may make your home feel five degrees warmer.
- Even the most efficient system can suffer if it's not properly maintained. For optimum comfort and sustainability, make sure all your HVAC installa-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ISTOCK VIA GETTY IMAGES PLUS

A few tweaks can reduce your household's impact on the planet.

tion, maintenance and other work is performed by a NATE-certified technician. NATE-certified technicians have demonstrated their knowledge of today's increasingly sophisticated heating and cooling systems by passing a nationally recognized test developed and supported by all segments of the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning industry. Better installation and service means your equipment will run at peak efficiency. Visit nate.org for additional HVAC energy-savings tips and resources, and to find a NATE-certified technician in your area.

Reduce Food Waste

American food production uses 10% of the nation's total energy budget, 50% of its land, and 80% of its freshwater, according to FoodRescue.net. Unfortunately, up to 40% of all food ends up in landfills. Label food items in your pantry and fridge and organize them by date to help ensure you consume food before it spoils. If you see that you've prepared too much of a certain item, freeze it. Of course, many foods produce unavoidable scraps. Use them to create stock or compost them. Composting will reduce your home's contribution to land-

fills while enriching your garden. Bonus: it's also a great way to reduce yardwork waste.

Make an Impact Today

Want a quick project you can complete in an afternoon? Swap out incandescent lightbulbs for energy efficient LEDs. According to the EPA, residential LEDs — especially ENERGY STAR-rated products — use at least 75% less energy, and last up to 25 times longer. Consider making Earth-friendly changes at home. A few tweaks can reduce your household's impact on the planet.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Residential LEDs use at least 75% less energy, and last up to 25 times longer, according to the EPA.



Composting will reduce your home's contribution to landfills while enriching your garden.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION



Insulating your home properly can make a big difference to your budget.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

HOME IMPROVEMENT

As energy prices soar, weatherizing homes gains new appeal

By Todd Woody
Bloomberg

Even before home energy costs began spiking this winter, David Moon had faced eye-popping bills to keep his Westchester, New York, house warm as his monthly heating oil tab approached \$1,000.

"It was a huge sticker shock for me," says Moon, who had bought his 4,400-square-foot home in 2019 after relocating from Nevada.

This winter, he didn't sweat his energy use, even though oil prices hit a seven-year high in early February and have now climbed above \$100 a barrel following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That's because in August, Moon completed a project that experts say is one of the most effective — if mundane — ways to lower high energy costs and cut a home's greenhouse-gas emissions: Plugging holes and insulating walls and attics. He also replaced a boiler with four highly efficient electric heat pumps that extract warmth from the outside air and circulate it through the home.

While his electricity bill has doubled most months, Moon says his overall energy costs have fallen as much as 60%. "The house is definitely more comfortable, and not drafty, and that alone was worth it," he says. "These days oil prices are pretty brutal, so it's nice not to worry about that."

The U.S. Energy Information Administration has forecast that heating oil expenditures will be 43% higher this winter than the last. On the West Coast, Pa-



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Unlike the green bragging rights that come with buying a Tesla or installing solar panels, neighbors are unlikely to wander over to admire your newly air-tight attic, making it a hard sell for some.

cific Gas & Electric Corp. has warned its California customers to expect higher bills as it passes on a 90% jump in natural gas prices. And that was before the war in Ukraine pushed oil and gas prices even higher.

Still, weatherizing a home can be a hard sell, according to Jeffery Liang, a project manager for BayREN, a Northern California clearinghouse for information on contractors and rebates for home energy efficiency improvements.

"Insulation is not very sexy," he says.

Unlike the green bragging rights that come with buying a Tesla or installing solar panels, neighbors are un-

likely to wander over to admire your newly air-tight attic. And while you can easily buy an electric car online, weatherization can involve navigating a welter of auditors, contractors and rebates.

But after a couple of hair-raising utility bills this winter, I decided it was time to get an energy audit of my charming but chilly 1928 home in Berkeley, California. They don't come cheap, though; I received quotes for as much as \$925 for a comprehensive evaluation.

The auditor I chose was thorough. She spent more than three hours mapping the house and gauging heat loss by imaging walls and

the source of the biggest heat loss. That fix would be less expensive as I'm replacing the roof this spring and can have insulation added by the contractor.

Another revelation: My furnace is oversized for the square footage of the house. That means it blasts so much hot air that the thermostat shuts the furnace down before the house is properly heated. Then as the interior temperature quickly drops, the furnace cranks up again. The ducts that distribute warm air through the house are also leaking heat.

Sealing holes and gaps in the building's frame would help stem heat loss and also keep out a now-perennial climate-driven pollutant in California — wildfire smoke.

"The average home in America loses 30% of heat in the ducts," says Liang. "The big opportunity to save energy is insulation, air sealing and duct sealing."

If I made all those upgrades I might realize a 40% gain in energy efficiency, the auditor said. But unlike spending five figures on a bathroom or kitchen remodel, unseen energy efficiency improvements may not necessarily be reflected in a higher resale value for a home.

To encourage homeowners to make such investments anyway, some governments and utilities offer rebates to help defray the cost. But a new financing model from a New York startup called Sealed promises to spare homeowners the upfront investment and the hassle of coordinating contractors. Another New York company, BlocPower,

offers a similar financing program to enable apartment building owners to replace boilers with heat pumps and make other energy efficiency upgrades.

Sealed financed and managed Moon's project to insulate his attic and install heat pumps as well as a heat pump water heater. His monthly payment to the company is based on his energy savings.

"If you don't save energy, we don't make money," says Lauren Salz, Sealed's co-founder and chief executive officer. "We're betting on big reductions in people's energy usage so there's a strong alignment of interest between us and the customer in recommending the right improvements and the best contractors."

The company, which currently operates in New York, New Jersey and the Philadelphia area, has amassed a database of different types of homes that have undergone upgrades over time. When Sealed signs up a customer it conducts an energy audit and uses what Salz calls a predictive machine learning model to forecast the probable energy savings of improvements under various weather conditions.

Josh Rosen hired Sealed to weatherize his Tarrytown, New York, home and install a heat pump. He says he's happy with the result but called the company's typical 20-year repayment contract "a long commitment."

Still, the business model and environmental benefits appealed to him. "They had an incentive to do a good job," he says.



You don't need to trade your privacy for energy savings and a comfortable home.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

HOME TECH

3 privacy questions to ask before buying a smart thermostat

Smart home devices are everywhere. From smart speakers to kitchen appliances to thermostats, these devices are helping people live a more convenient, comfortable life. How this happens is through technology that often analyzes your habits and patterns. While there are significant advantages to using smart technology, it's important to consider: How much of your privacy are you giving up while using smart home devices?

According to a report from the Smart Energy Consumer Collaborative (SECC), data security and privacy remain a top concern for consumers. Nearly two-thirds of all survey respondents said they are concerned about potential data leaks, and 45% of those who do not have a smart home device see data privacy as a barrier to purchasing.

One smart home device that is growing in popularity is a smart thermostat. This is in part due to the many benefits it offers, including the ability to save money, use energy more efficiently and have a comfortable house year-round. To be most effective, a smart home device can virtually “feel” and “listen” to what is happening in your home. That's why, as you consider a smart thermostat from one of the many companies in this fast-growing market, asking a few key questions can help you better understand how they use your information.

What data are they collecting — and what will they do with it?

Review the company's terms of service and privacy policy carefully to understand the type of information it is collecting and how it will use it. Reputable companies should have strong consent management that puts you in the driver's seat of your own information.

In particular, watch for how companies use your activity data. Even if a company confirms it does not share or sell your data to third parties, it is possible it may still be using your thermostat data (such as when you are



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Smart thermostats are increasingly common in homes worldwide - and for good reason.

home or not home) for other purposes beyond heating and cooling your house.

Does the thermostat require you to integrate with a larger platform?

Does the product require you to use its smart home platform or have other requirements to use the basic features of the thermostat? Activities like these often give companies easy access to your data. You should be able to easily use your thermostat without jumping through hoops.

Are they recording what you say?

Some smart thermostats include a microphone so you can use your voice to interact with the thermostat. If it has a microphone, do you know how that information is being used or stored? If this is a concern for you, there are smart thermostat options

without microphones available.

Selecting the right smart thermostat

Smart thermostats are increasingly common in homes worldwide — and for good reason. They enable homeowners to easily control their ideal temperature and even lower their energy costs through the touch of a smartphone. The key with any smart home product is to do your research to ensure you are buying a smart thermostat that meets your needs without sacrificing your privacy.

Emerson, a trusted thermostat manufacturer with over a 100-year history in the HVAC industry, offers one such option with its Sensi smart thermostats. Upon initial account setup, Emerson only collects basic information and is transparent in the fact that it does not sell your personal information or leverage your thermostat activity

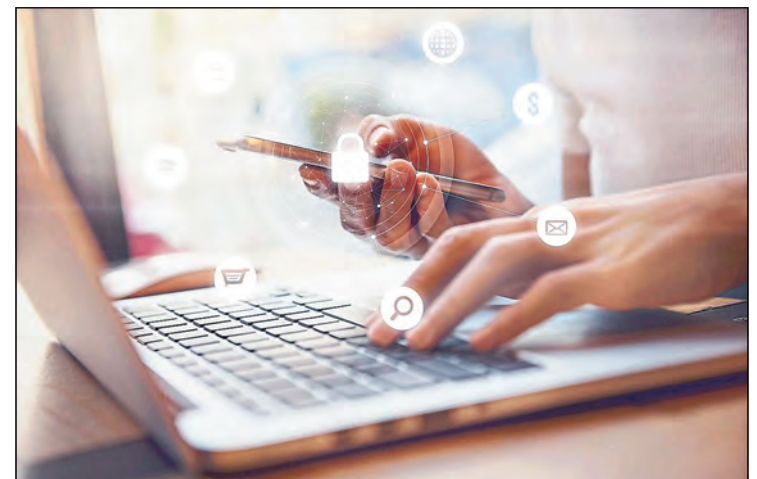


PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

The key with any smart home product is to do your research to ensure you are buying a smart thermostat that meets your needs without sacrificing your privacy.

data for other targeting or advertising purposes.

You don't need to trade your privacy for energy savings and a comfortable home. To learn more

about smart thermostats that prioritize your data privacy, visit Sensi.Emerson.com/DataPrivacy.

Story courtesy of Brandpoint

HOME SAFETY

5 tips to protect your family from home fires

Nobody wants to believe a catastrophic event like a fire can happen to them, but home fires affect tens of thousands of families every year. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), home fires occur more in the winter than during any other season.

Take the following steps to ensure your family and home are protected from the unexpected.

1. Test, maintain and replace.

Correct smoke alarm placement, regular maintenance and alarm replacement are essential parts of a comprehensive fire safety plan. Once alarms are installed on every level and in every bedroom, test them regularly, change the batteries every six months if battery-powered and be sure all alarms have a battery backup if hardwired. If you can't think of when you last installed your smoke alarms, chances are, it's time to replace them. Smoke alarms don't last forever and need to be replaced at least every 10 years. When it's time to replace your alarms, install alarms with a 10-year sealed battery that eliminates late-night battery chirps and battery replacements for a decade.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

Home fires affect tens of thousands of families every year.

2. Plan and practice your escape plan.

Installing smoke alarms is step one, but knowing what to do when they go off is vital to your home safety plan. Involve everybody in your household when developing an emergency escape plan. Collectively identify two exits out of each room, including windows and doors, and set a dedicated meeting spot outside. Once outside, stay outside and

call 911. Be sure to practice your escape plan with your entire family at least twice a year.

"When developing an escape plan, it's important to prioritize escaping, leaving all personal belongings behind," said Ashley Gocken, a home safety expert with First Alert, a leader in residential fire safety. "The planning process helps families practice how to safely evacuate children, pets and

anyone in the household needing special assistance."

3. Identify your exit.

Doors are a great way to gauge the closeness of a fire. Before opening a door, feel the doorknob or higher on the door with the back of your hand. If it is hot, or if there is smoke coming around the door, leave it closed and use your second way out. If you decide to open a door, do it slowly and

be ready to shut it quickly if heavy smoke or fire is present. If you can't get out, cover vents and cracks around the door with clothing, towels or newspapers to keep smoke out. Call 911, stay where you are and signal for help at the window with a light-colored cloth or flashlight.

4. Stay low.

If you encounter smoke while escaping from



Before opening a door, feel the doorknob or higher on the door with the back of your hand. If it is hot, or if there is smoke coming around the door, leave it closed and use your second way out.

a fire, consider using an alternative escape route. However, heavy smoke and poisonous gases collect first along the ceiling, so if you must escape through smoke, drop to the floor, crawl on your hands and knees and keep your head 12 to 24 inches above the floor.

5. Close windows and doors.

Before bed or when leaving home, you should always close windows and doors as a preventative measure. This is important because oxygen will allow

fires to continue to grow if a fire does start. Closing windows and doors holds back the radiating heat of fire for a short period. If a fire breaks out when you are home, focus on your escape plan rather than closing windows and doors. This allows you a better chance to escape and can also improve otherwise untenable conditions.

To learn more about how to keep your family and home safe from fire, visit FirstAlert.com.

Story courtesy of Brandpoint

HOME DECOR

Designers' top 2022 kitchen and bathroom trends

Life at home has changed a lot and, for many people, being “on trend” has taken a backseat to designing around their needs. When it comes to styling your kitchen and bathroom, taking time to choose stylish, yet lasting options, will improve the look and feel of your space for years.

Delta Faucet Company product designers and Delta Faucet lighting partner Kichler Lighting are sharing the timeless kitchen and bathroom trends they're seeing in real customers' homes that will last well beyond the next trip around the sun.

2022 Trend 1: Comfort Comes First

“Homes are our safe space from what's happening in the world,” said AJ Tentler, Delta Faucet Company industrial designer. “Items, colors and finishes need to reflect that feeling of relaxed comfort.”

Sharp edges and harsh lines are out. We're now craving curves and softer lines to create a relaxing and calming oasis. Warm greys and wood in its natural state are coming together in both kitchens and bathrooms to create spaces that never feel forced.

2022 Trend 2: Hidden Helpfulness

“The features that will gain the most momentum are things that aid your daily function,” said Maris Park Borris, Delta Faucet industrial designer. “It will be more about hidden helpfulness.”

Simple interactions that make daily life easier is the future of technology. Smart outlets and switches add a world of customization to lighting. In faucets, intuitive

functions, like technology that turns on a faucet with a simple touch, is just one example of unseen technology that improves daily life.

2022 Trend 3: Designs You Can Feel

“We've been in sensory deprivation for the last year,” said Park Borris. “People are craving both visual and physical texture.”

Texture and finish are going to be more in-focus than ever. Wallpaper that adds a tactile and visual texture, or fixture finishes, can create an emotional connection with a huge impact on a space.

2022 Trend 4: Mix and Match

“We can add eclecticism and our own style — like traditional knobs in a modern kitchen,” said Park Borris.

We're all searching for ways to make a space our own. Mixing and matching styles and finishes is a unique way to accomplish that. Farmhouse blended with Scandinavian styles. A gold-hued shower head with black shower doors. It's all about what speaks to you.

2022 Trend 5: Timelessly Tailored

“In 2022, customizable sconces are on the rise,” said Greg Martin, Kichler Lighting creative director. “Being able to have moveable arms, pin-up and plug-in options allow you to curate your own look.”

Tailored, purposeful and customized pieces are everywhere. We no longer want to keep up with the Joneses. Instead, we want unique spaces that reflect our individual style. Updates that people can do themselves



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

Simple interactions that make daily life easier is the future of technology, according to leading design experts.

make homes feel more customized and ownable.

2022 Trend 6: Outside In

“There's a feeling of connection and warmth derived from the coziness and luxury of plants,” said Ben Stoler, Delta Faucet Company industrial designer.

Plants have a purifying quality and make a space feel fresh and alive. Adding greenery can add a calming and de-stressing feeling to a room, further building your very own oasis.

Craving more kitchen and bathroom trends? Get inspired at deltafaucet.com/blogs.

Story courtesy of *Brandpoint*



These timeless kitchen and bathroom trends will last well beyond the next trip around the sun.

HOME MAINTENANCE

Maintaining a healthy Indoor Air Quality

If family members are constantly suffering from allergies, your home is consistently dusty, you are suffering from bloody noses or dry eyes, or if there are odors that linger in your home, you may have a poor Indoor Air Quality, or IAQ. The good news is that there are multiple steps homeowners can take to improve the IAQ of their home.

The following are a few tips from Dayna Hottle, operations manager of C&C Heating & Air Conditioning in Roseville:

What are sources of poor IAQ?

- Pets
- Smoking in the house
- Cooking

- Candles

How can you improve the ventilation in your home?

Be sure to change your air filters regularly. You can also install a variable speed motor furnace. These systems result in better air quality because they run in longer cycles so more air passes through

the system's air filter, resulting in cleaner air.

Are air cleaners effective in removing particles and other contaminants?

Yes, air cleaners are effective, but the amount of effectiveness differ between the types of filtration system installed.

How can you determine if a whole-home, humidifier, UV germicidal light or ductwork repair is the best option for your home?

Have a professional come out and discuss the many options available and what would be best for your family and home.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

If you're unsure about your home's Indoor Air Quality, it's best to consult a professional.

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Pros and cons to open-concept homes

Open-concept homes have become increasingly popular in recent years. An open-concept home is one in which the rooms flow into one another with limited obstruction from walls or other barriers. According to the National Association of Home Builders, 84% of new single-family homes have fully or partially open layouts.

While they may seem like a new trend, open floor plans are anything but. Early American homes featured open, often one- or two-room units built around the central kitchen/hearth. This maximized warmth and functionality. Homes evolved as incomes grew, and soon homes had several smaller rooms with specialized functions.

What's old has become new again. However, before diving head first into a new home purchase or a big renovation to realize an open-concept dream, consider the pros and cons of this type of setup to determine if it's really right for you.

Advantages of open floor plans

Open floor plans facilitate the flow of natural light throughout a space and can promote air flow, helping to reduce warm or cool pockets of air in otherwise closed-off rooms. Open homes make socializing easier, even when people are doing different things. While someone is cooking dinner in the kitchen, he or she can still interact with someone else playing video games in the family room or paying bills in the home office. Entertaining also is easier, as mingling with guests is much more convenient when walls are not getting in the way.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Open-concept homes are popular, but homeowners should weigh the pros and cons to see if this trend is truly right for them.

A smaller home can feel much larger if it employs an open concept. The square footage is not divided into smaller quarters, which sometimes are rooms (such as formal dining rooms) that are only used a few times per year. This eliminates underused spaces and opens up sight lines in the layout.

The value of real estate has risen dramatically since

the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and prospective buyers may prefer an open-concept plan because it can help them minimize building costs.

Disadvantages of open floor plans

Open layouts are not for everyone. The same sense of space that occurs when walls are taken down may

make rooms feel cavernous and less cozy, particularly in homes with ample square footage. In addition, privacy can be hard to come by when all rooms feed into one another.

When the kitchen is not separate from the family room space, that makes it easy for noise to compromise the area's comfort levels. There is no hiding from noise in an open floor plan,

as sounds from voices, television shows and appliances tend to echo and blend together. And if the home is a single-story layout, those noises from the main living areas also may carry to adjacent bedrooms.

Smoke and smells are another thing to consider. When something on the stove spills over, a small range hood will not be practical for clearing

smoke from a large space. Though the aroma of freshly cooked food is enticing, it can make it hard for cooks to keep guests out of the kitchen.

Open-concept homes are popular, but homeowners should weigh the pluses and minuses to see if this trend is truly right for them.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

HOME DECOR

Tips to add farmhouse-style elements to your home design



PHOTO COURTESY OF STATEPOINT MEDIA

“Board ‘n batten” is a centuries-old siding design that encapsulates the appeal of farmhouse-style homes.

When it comes to home design, farmhouse style represents a total intersection of beauty and practicality, making it no surprise that many are embracing this traditional look today. Whatever architectural style your home is, adding key design elements can help you get in on best aspects of the farmhouse trend. Here are a few renovations to consider:

- An updated porch. Adding a front porch or expanding an existing porch will not only add charming farmhouse-style curb appeal, but extend your outdoor living area as well. Be sure to take as much care decorating your porch as you would any other room of your home. Include comfy furniture, like rocking chairs and a porch swing, complete with cushions. Add potted plants for a touch of vibrant greenery, lantern wall sconces for illumination, and outdoor rugs for coziness. Don't forget the entryway. Make it more inviting with seasonal wreaths and a cheerful welcome mat.

- Board ‘n batten siding. Imparting a rustic, handmade quality to any home, even those built-in contemporary styles, “board ‘n batten” is a centuries-old siding design that encapsulates the appeal of farmhouse-style homes. The term “batten” refers to the strip of molding placed across the joint between boards. The resulting look boasts an attractive geometry of strong vertical lines balanced by a sense of texture across the horizontal face. While the look is traditional, you can pair it with the very latest in siding technology. For example, CedarMAX Insulated Siding from ProVia comes in many styles, including board ‘n batten. This complete thermal cladding system offers continuous insulation for maximum energy savings.

With five times greater impact resistance than regular siding and a weather barrier shield, this is not just a charming aesthetic upgrade, but one that will improve the comfort of your home for years to come.

- Metal roofing. There's a reason metal roofing plays prominently into the design of authentic farmhouses — they are built to last. That's truer than ever today, thanks to advances in metal roofing technology. Offering superior color retention, long-term reliability, energy efficiency and environmental friendliness, architectural-grade metal shingle roofing is an upgrade that can add both beauty and value to your home. In the case of ProVia's Metal Slate Roofing, which is designed to look like classic quarried slate shingles, you can draw on the beauty of nature in shades of gray and brown, while enjoying proven protection from hail, wind, rain, and corrosion.

- Interior touches. Restyle your home's interior to be farmhouse-inspired with a few renovations. Classic looks include neutral walls, such as matte shades of beige, grays and creams, shabby chic furniture — think wicker, distressed wood and reclaimed lumber — and hardwood flooring. Consider dusting off a few hand-me-downs or visiting antique shops and estate sales for one-of-a-kind finds. Above all, be sure to prioritize comfort, warmth, and practicality.

To embrace everything that a home should be — an inviting place to gather with friends and family — add farmhouse-style touches to your home, indoors and out.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



To embrace everything that a home should be — an inviting place to gather with friends and family — add farmhouse-style touches to your home, indoors and out.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

HOME TECH

The possibilities of the smart kitchen of 2022 are nearly endless

It seems that most people have experienced a lifestyle transformation over the past two years. Remote living means more people are cooking and eating at home, creating higher standards for their kitchen space. Fortunately, the newest appliances and technology advances are meeting these demands and helping people live more comfortable, efficient lives.

Today's reimagined kitchen is smarter, healthier and greener — designed for optimal wellness in the home. Technology is helping homeowners maximize their kitchen's potential, giving them the ability to do things they never have before.

Tech lifestyle expert and HGTV TV personality Carley Knobloch agrees. "Consumers today have a strong desire for high-tech appliances that not only simplify their home but also allow them to live a more flexible lifestyle," she says. "This year's Kitchen and Bath Industry Show unveiled some promising hi-tech appliances making advancements in this space to help homeowners truly make the most of their living spaces."

Here are some of the top kitchen trends of 2022 that help streamline life and modernize how you can use the kitchen space:

Rethink refrigeration

After spending increased amounts of time at home, many homeowners have decided to add more personalized rooms to their homes, like home gyms, offices, art studios, theaters and more. With that, came the desire for more versatile appliances that could fit into any of these new spaces. Products that have become increasingly popular are undercounter refrigerators, especially those that can blend easily into cabinetry.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRANDPOINT

Today's reimagined kitchen is smarter, healthier and greener — designed for optimal wellness in the home.

Undercounter refrigerators offer added convenience to the home, whether you need extra space for entertaining or want to keep certain cosmetics or toiletries chilled in your master suite.

Those aren't the only refrigerators getting upgrades, the French door category also continues to be a top trend in kitchens throughout the country, but limited sizing was previously an issue for some homeowners. Now, the first-ever 48-inch French door refrigerator from Signature Kitchen Suite is opening this option to more people than ever, bringing beauty and functionality into any luxury kitchen.

Ovens with options

Warmer weather is just around the corner, meaning entertaining season is coming back in full force. The good news is you don't need a huge kitchen to be a pro host. Many kitchen appliances today offer more functionality in one product so you can get more cooking done in one convenient space.



Imagine scanning a recipe, having it populate your grocery cart so you can order the foods you need and then having your smart appliance know exactly how to cook those foods to perfection.

For instance, the latest ranges now feature double-oven designs, so you can bake or roast two dishes at different temperatures at once in separate oven cavities. LG's new slide-in range delivers the most when it comes to multifunctional cooking with several cooking modes including ProBake Convection — the gold standard in convection technology, for even baking on every rack, every time. Plus, Air Fry helps you turn out crispy flavor to

feed a crowd while Air Sous Vide locks in moisture and aroma to deliver meats, fish and poultry that are tender, juicy and consistently delicious.

For added convenience, the microwave easily connects to the range for automatic ventilation and lighting when cooking on the range's cooktop, while InstaView technology allows you to check on the cooking progress by simply knocking twice on the glass to illuminate the interior.



French door refrigerators continue to be a top trend in kitchens throughout the country.

More than a microwave

Does your microwave oven cook unevenly, where some parts of foods are overcooked, and others are still cold? If so, it's time for an upgrade. Modern smart microwaves cook foods quickly and evenly with advanced technology that provides delicious results and added features that complement the way you use your kitchen.

Thanks to the slide-out "ExtendaVent, your cooking atmosphere is kept clear and clean as it reduces the presence of smoke and lingering odors in the kitchen. Plus, cleaning has never been easier with the EasyClean interior that features a special coating to prevent food and grease from sticking.

Integrated recipes

Imagine scanning a recipe, having it populate your grocery cart so you can order the foods you need and then having your smart appliance know exactly how to

cook those foods to perfection. This is now a reality thanks to the new "ThinQ Recipe" service that works with several of the cooking appliances, like LG's new range and over-the-range microwave, and it can be easily accessed via an app. Now you can search, plan, purchase and cook delicious recipes whenever you want from the comfort of your kitchen. The new tool even offers over 10,000 shoppable recipes via Walmart and Amazon Fresh delivery services. Plus, with the Scan to Cook feature, you can easily scan the UPC barcode on select ready-made meals to remotely set temperature and cooking time.

As Knobloch points out, we're all likely going to continue to spend more time cooking, eating and enjoying time together in your kitchen. To make the most of the space and your time, these smart appliances are a smart investment.

Story courtesy of Brandpoint

HOME APPLIANCES

Is it time for a new dishwasher? 5 questions to ask yourself



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

If your dishwasher breaks down frequently or doesn't seem to be getting the job done, it may be time for an upgrade.

There's no reason to be working harder in the kitchen than you need to be, especially when it comes to clean-up.

"When considering a new dishwasher, it's important to understand that many dishwashers are created equal, but are not priced equal. Most major brands offer similar features at varying prices. Sharp dishwashers are designed to offer high-end features at an excellent value," says Peter Weedfald, senior vice president of Sales & Marketing, Sharp Home Electronics Company of America.

So, how do you know when it's time for an upgrade in your kitchen? Weedfald shares five questions to ask yourself:

1. What's my dishwasher's cleaning and drying power? While earlier dishwashers often required you to do quite a

bit of soaking and rinsing before loading the machine, some of today's models feature soil sensors that automatically optimize your washing cycles. Plus, the option to place your most challenging and soiled cookware near special sprayers that deliver extra scrubbing power can also be a huge time- and labor-saver. Some new models have also made hand-drying a thing of the past, thanks to heated drying, which is faster and more dependable than condensation drying.

2. Does my dishwasher offer premium features and design at a reasonable price point? Sharp is a good example of a manufacturer offering classic, elegant luxuries both inside and outside its dishwashers at an affordable price point compared to other brands of-

fering similar features. Inside its dishwashers are smooth glide rails that make loading and unloading a breeze, as well as premium, white LED lights offering good visibility. Outside is an easy-to-clean stainless-steel finish that nicely complements other kitchen appliances and fixtures. Plus, a hidden control panel makes for a sleek design that minimizes distractions.

3. Does my dishwasher offer flexibility? For an efficiently run kitchen, flexibility is key. To that end, you shouldn't have to wait until you have a full load's worth of dishes to run your machine. Look for a dishwasher with a half-load option, as well as adjustable racks to accommodate large casserole dishes, tall stemware, and oddly sized items.



Thanks to new innovations, dishwashing isn't what it used to be.

4. Is my dishwasher energy efficient? If either sustainability or saving money on utilities are priorities for you, be sure to look for ENERGY STAR rated dishwashers with features such as a half-load option that reduces water and energy consumption when washing smaller loads.

5. Is my dishwasher quiet? To put things in perspective, any dishwasher is going to produce some level of noise. Anything below 52 dBA is considered very quiet. The difference between a 40dBA and 45dBA model will be minimal, so be careful you are not overpaying for this feature.

For more information and resources, visit shop.sharppusa.com.

Thanks to new innovations, dishwashing isn't what it used to be. For less mess, stress, and hassle, consider upgrading your dishwasher for a better experience.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

HOME MAINTENANCE

How to prep your AC for summer heat

Though you may not be flipping on your A/C unit right away this spring, a little prep work goes a long way in ensuring a stress-free summer when it comes to keeping your home and your family cool. Here are five tips from Dayna Hottle, operations manager of C&C Heating & Air Conditioning in Roseville, on how to keep your A/C unit in working order all year-round.

Q: What is the best thing you should do to ready your air conditioning for summer?

A: Clean the vents and call a reputable HVAC service company to perform a maintenance check on your existing equipment.

When an air conditioner unit sits unused during the fall and winter months, collecting leaves and debris, some maintenance may be needed to get it in working order. Those who opt out may end up facing longer wait times during peak season, and perhaps, peak prices.

Q: If you decide to have air conditioning maintenance service, what should you consider when picking a service company?

A: First, check Google and other reviews and ratings, then look for a company that has some longevity. Finally, research if the company offers warranties on their work.

Q: What are some questions you should ask the service tech?



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A little A/C prep work can go a long way in ensuring a cool summer season at home.

A: • What are some things I can do as the homeowner to prolong the life of my equipment?

• What are the benefits of a maintenance plan?
• Is there anything I need to know about my older HVAC unit?

Q: How can I maintain the work the tech performed?

A: • Keep your outside condenser cleared of any debris or vegetation. If the condenser gets dirty throughout the summer, gently rinse the condenser

with a hose.

• Change the air filters regularly.
• Replace any damaged insulation around your unit's outdoor lines.

Q: What are the first steps you should take if you experience a break

down or other issues with the system?

A: • Check your air filter for clogs and change it if it is dirty.
• Check the thermostat to see if the batteries need to be changed.
• Check the breaker in

the electrical panel to ensure the breaker hasn't tripped.

• Check the switch on the furnace to make sure it is in the on position.
If you've tried all of the above and the unit still does not work or work correctly, call a professional.

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