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#### Woodburning fireplaces or fuel stoves can add warmth and ambiance to a home. These appliances are particularly coveted in the cooler months when people spend more time indoors. Maintenance is necessary in order for fireplaces and stoves to function safely, and that upkeep must include paying close attention to the functionality of the chimney.

Chimneys are designed to last for decades. Cracks and spalling in brick chimneys are common concerns that can Get Ahead Of Chimney Repair This Season

cause significant damage if left unchecked. Chimney maintenance involves more than cleaning the flue. Rather than running the risk of costly repairs, which can cost several thousand dollars, homeowners can take some simple steps to keep their chimneys in tip-top shape. Certain components of chimney maintenance are do-it-yourself tasks, while others may be better left to the professionals.

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• Conduct a visual inspection of the chimney to check for any cracks or spalling. Spalling is

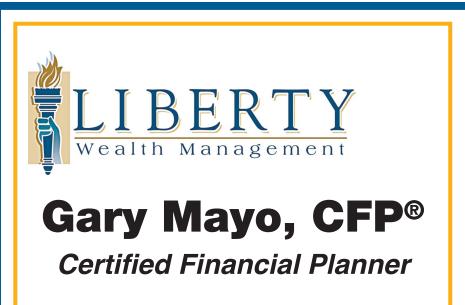
ing properly. When using fire-

places and other appliances,

dampers need to be open to

allow smoke to vent outside; otherwise, smoke will be

trapped in the home and could



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the wearing away of masonry due to water, weather and time. If enough of the material erodes, that erosion can adversely affect the structural integrity of the chimney. Some repairs can be made by patching up cracks or replacing missing bricks. Chimney tuckpointing is the process of repairing mortar.

• Think about waterproofing the chimney to prevent damage. A water sealant applied to the outside of the chimney can prevent moisture from breaking down the masonry.

• Inspect and replace the chimney cap if it is worn out. A chimney cap is a contraption that sits atop the chimney to allow the smoke to vent while also preventing critters and water from going inside the flue, helping to extend the flue life. The chimney cap attaches to the flue liner, so outside dimensions should be taken to ensure the cap is the right size for the chimney.

• Have the chimney swept. Sweeping helps remove the soot and debris that clings to the inside of the flue, known as creosote. The amount of time the fireplace is used will determine how often the chimney must be cleaned. Generally speaking, the chimney liner needs to be cleaned if it has 1/8-inch or more of soot.

Regular inspection and maintenance can help keep a chimney working safely for decades. For those who do not like working at such an elevation, leave exterior chimney repair to a certified professional.



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Why Excavation Is Best Left To The Professionals

When shopping for a home, buyers often try to envision themselves living in a given property. Images of family gatherings and holidays may instantly come to mind, but prospective homeowners also may begin to envision changes they would make to a property if they were eventually to call it home.

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Changing an existing structure or building an entirely new home on an empty plot of land can be exciting. Such changes

typically require excavation. which is a complicated process that may be necessary for projects big or small. WHAT IS EXCAVATION? Excavation is the process of extracting material from the ground by digging. Earth, rock and other materials may be moved during the excavation

process. CAN DO-IT-YOURSELFERS EXCAVATE? Skilled DIYers who have participated in excavation projects in the past may

be able to handle a project on their own. However, it's important that homeowners recognize that excavation is about more than just digging in the ground. It's a complicated process that requires the use of specialized tools and equipment. In addi-tion, a strong understanding of the land that will be excavated is required for the project to be

safe and go smoothly. WHY HIRE AN EXCAVATION PROFESSIONAL? Even the most skilled DIYer might be bet-





ter off hiring an excavation professional than going it alone. That's true for a number of reasons

 LIABILITY: Homeowners who hire a fully licensed and insured professional excavation firm can rest easy knowing that they will not be responsible for any damages or injuries that may occur during the project. • PERMITS/REQUIREMENTS:

A professional excavation firm typically files all the necessary paperwork for work permits or can advise which permits homeowners will need to go forward with the project. In addition, professionals will know the local laws regarding building and excavation. For example, homeowners may be unfamiliar with the concept of lateral sup-port, which refers to landowners' right to have their land physically supported in its natural state by adjoining land and underground structures. This is an important concept to understand during an excavation proiect, and professionals can advise homeowners if a project they want to undertake will vio-

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late lateral support laws. • EXPERIENCE: Perhaps the best reason to work with excavation professionals is their experience. A lack of excavation experience can result in damage to a homeowner's property and surrounding properties, which can prove costly. DIYers may not know the type of soil they have on their property nor recognize the different

types of challenges each type of soil can present during an exca-vation project. Such knowledge comes with experience and is often invaluable.

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Skilled DIYers can tackle many home improvement projects on their own. However, the complex nature of excavation makes these types of projects the kind that are best left to skilled professionals.

Why Homeowners Should Add More Exterior Light To Their Properties

Homeowners are increasingly realizing the benefits of improving the exteriors of their home, which can be just as valuable as improving the interior spaces. As individuals design picturesque garden beds and cultivate lavish lawns or revamp exteriors with architectural features, they probably want to spotlight these improvements. This is where exterior lighting

focal points around the landscape and highlight the best features of a property. Uplighting in trees, silhouetting techniques to showcase plants and spotlights to show off architectural features are all options for homeowners to consider.

Add value: The experts at Parker Homescape, a land-scape design service, say that exterior lighting can add roughly 30 percent to the value of a home. They also indicate that 50 percent of all home buyers say that outdoor lighting is important when buying a home. If current residents are thinking about selling, now may be the time to invest in exterior lighting. Improving a home's exterior may be as simple as adding more lighting to improve functionality and beauty.

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can be put to great use. Exterior illumination can cast a glow on various features, but there are many other reasons to increase lighting around the exterior of a home.

 Safety: Trips and falls can occur at night when trying to traverse walkways and landscapes in the dark, as it can be difficult to see rocks, stairs and uneven pavement. Outdoor lighting can illuminate pathways, entryways and other areas for safer access for homeowners and their guests. Extend outdoor entertaining: Ample lighting can increase the amount of time one can use outdoor spaces and make them the perfect gathering spot. As autumn arrives, days become shorter. However, patios, porches and more can get extended use with lighting. • Safeguard security: A well-lit home may be less likely to be targeted by burglars than one swathed in darkness and shadows. Lights can remain on all evening or be motion-triggered. Setting lights on timers also ensures that the home is illuminated whether residents are home or not.

Create drama: Landscape lighting designers can establish

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gles from contributing to more widespread damage. Moisture and poor ventilation may be contributing to curled shingles as well. Homeowners with attics in their home may see curled shingles on their roofs because moisture is building up

dominantly with spikes. However, many industry professionals now install gutters with hanger brack-ets. Why the change? Spikes loosen over time, leading to the gutters hanging off the home. That can contribute to serious issues if left untreated. Gutters hanging off the home need not necessarily be replaced, but rather secured to the home, ideally with hanger brackets instead of spikes. Brackets hook into the front of the gutter and are then screwed into the fascia of a home. A professional who specializes in gutter repair can perform this task relatively quickly, and it's an inexpensive yet highly effective solution.

home may indicate that water is seeping over the edge of the gutter closest to your home. When that happens, water is coming down the side of the house, causing the paint to peel. In such instances, replacing the gutters is often necessary.

· Basement flooding: Not all signs

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in their poorly ventilated attics. In addition to causing damage such as curled shingles, a poorly ventilated attic allows moisture to build up, potentially contributing to mold growth. Mold presents a host of additional problems, including some that can adversely affect the health of a home's inhabitants.

of deteriorating gutters are outside a home. Many a homeowner has been flummoxed by flooding in their basements, and such flooding can be caused by aging, ineffective gutters. That's because deteriorating gutters sometimes allow water to leak near the foundation of a home, contributing to basement flooding.

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