

Spring Home Improvement



 MediaNews Group

Your guide to renovations and interior design

Offering sound advice

Michigan housing experts outline popular upgrades

PAGE 4

Green thumb

How to grow houseplants without ever having to buy one **PAGE 10**

Tub time

Features to consider for a relaxation-themed bathroom remodel **PAGE 24**

SPRING HOME IMPROVEMENT » STORY INDEX

- **Michigan housing experts** outline popular spring home improvements **Page 4**
- **Buy, build or fix:** Basics for home buyers **Page 6**
- **How to get your tools prepped** for spring planting **Page 8**
- **How to grow houseplants** without ever having to buy one **Page 10**
- **10 affordable ways** to jazz up an all-white kitchen **Page 12**
- **6 hacks** for keeping shoe clutter in check **Page 14**
- **The low-maintenance, eco-friendly lawn** that will still impress your neighbors **Page 16**
- **5 renovations** that provide a strong return on investment **Page 18**
- **Small renovations** that make a big impact **Page 19**
- **How to make** a home more cozy **Page 20**
- **Front vs. top loaders:** Is one type of washing machine better? **Page 22**
- **Features to consider** for a relaxation-themed bathroom remodel **Page 24**
- **How to keep kids safe** during a home renovation project **Page 27**
- **The best kid bedroom** paint colors, according to pro designers **Page 28**
- **How to make renovation** projects go smoothly **Page 32**
- **Projected timelines** for popular renovation projects **Page 33**
- **How to prepare** for a lengthy renovation project **Page 34**
- **The basics of basement** conversion projects **Page 35**
- **Tips to make guest rooms** more welcoming **Page 36**
- **Your washing machine** can clean a lot more than clothes **Page 38**
- **How to pick a whole home's** worth of paint colors **Page 40**
- **How designers make rooms** that work for colorblind clients **Page 42**
- **What to know** when thinking of doing a garage remodel **Page 44**
- **Common questions** and answers about carpeting **Page 45**
- **How to recognize** when it's time to replace your windows **Page 46**
- **How spring cleaning** also declutters emotional and mental health **Page 47**
- **Tips to make a living room** a more comfortable, welcoming space **Page 48**



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AROUND THE HOUSE

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Open floor plans are on many people's wish lists.

MICHIGAN HOUSING EXPERTS OUTLINE POPULAR SPRING HOME IMPROVEMENTS

By Mark E Lett
For MediaNews Group

Ah, spring. Baseball, flower festivals, golfing and boating. But, wait. For many, spring is peak season for buying a home or heavy-duty upgrades to where they already live.

Spring, for many, means taking action on that wish list of new properties or home improvements to prepare a house for better liv-

ing or resale.

Either way, there are decisions to be made and steps to be taken. It pays to know the trends for what's hot, what's not and what might work best for you.

From outdoor living to energy efficiency and popular colors, prospective home buyers face a long list of decisions.

Here's some advice from those in the know.

Many turn to Matt DeLapp, general manager of Singh Homes,

based in West Bloomfield.

Founded in 1973, Singh is a nationally ranked developer and builder of subdivisions, apartment communities and commercial properties. The company's portfolio of residential developments includes communities in Novi, Canton and South Lyon, as well as developments in North Carolina and across the Atlantic Coast.

DeLapp's activities provide a first-hand view of buyer wants



Matt DeLapp



Nathan Boji



Outdoor lighting improvements can include landscape lighting for sidewalks and driveways, including solar-powered lights that don't have to be hardwired.

and needs and the trends in building and home remodeling.

Among the most popular are:

Outdoor living

"Living in Michigan means enduring some harsh winters," DeLapp said, noting that buyers increasingly value well-designed outdoor living space for those warmer months. Built-in grills, kitchen space and accessible space are keys.

DeLapp's emphasis on outdoor living areas is backed by Nathan Boji, associate broker and vice-president of ReMax Classic real estate, based in Farmington Hills.

"We're seeing some elaborate outdoor spaces," said Boji, adding that home buyers value "three-season space" featuring covered patios and porches, a kitchen and retractable screening. An outdoor gas line is growing in popularity, eliminating the hassles that go with propane tanks.

For home sellers, DeLapp recommends outdoor lighting improvements that include landscape lighting for sidewalks and driveways.

"A lot of cool solutions

are available without having to be hardwired," he said. Among those options: solar-powered lights.

Energy efficiency

More buyers are looking for long-term ways to cut future energy costs, DeLapp said. The shopping list of cost-cutting features in new homes and upgrades is growing and includes window replacements to combat heat loss, improved thermostats to better regulate temperatures and bills, electric car chargers, solar panels and tankless water heaters.

"Many are finding that up-front costs pay off in the long run in lower monthly bills," DeLapp said.

Boji also said smart-home features are growing in popularity, including improved thermostats and smart doorbells that add security and convenience.

Colors

While neutral and white colors remain, but other colors — strategically placed — are gaining popularity, DeLapp said.

Black doors. Greens and blues and grays for walls.

In a report last year, House Beautiful cited a Zillow Research study that

determined "rich, memorable colors" are in increasing demand and, when well-presented, add value to home prices.

The company's paint color analysis reported that buyers paid \$2,512 more on average when kitchens are painted in a moody gray hue and \$1,755 when the color is used in a living room.

Living space

With the aging of America, it's a given that the market is strong for ranch homes and single-story homes.

Inside that space, trends are emerging, including some shaped by our experience with the COVID-19 pandemic and practices that kept many at home and increased the work-from-home experience.

DeLapp said open floor plans are on many wish lists, as well as "multi-functional space" such as rooms that can be used as a bar, an office or a second kitchen. So, too, are "pocket offices," he said, where a computer can be set up for work or for students of all ages.

Boji added that buyers also are citing a need for multiple-use space that can be utilized as a play



European shower doors can provide a spa-like look.



"Pocket offices," where a computer can be set up for work or for students of all ages, are gaining in popularity.

room, a game room or a place for a Murphy bed to accommodate visits by "mom and dad or the kids."

Boji said multiple-use space for home workouts and mini-spas is high on many lists.

In addition, Boji said buyers and homeowners making upgrades are keen on drawers that pull out, built-in pantries and efficient cabinet space.

Other interior design

features gaining popularity, DeLapp said, include wider door frames and more accessible showers and stylish, higher-end fixtures. "A lot of cool aftermarket parts can be added without ripping apart the walls," he said.

Add to that, he said, are bathroom enhancements that include "frameless" European shower doors that provide a spa-like look.

Kitchen

Boji said luxury kitchens have become a must-have for increasing numbers of buyers. Features they seek include "a kitchen inside a kitchen" to provide less-elaborate space for simple preparations; a "super pantry" to make storage more accessible; luxury countertops with higher-end quartz and porcelain, large islands and stainless materials.

PLANNING

BUY, BUILD OR FIX: BASICS FOR HOME BUYERS

By Kate Wood

NerdWallet

Hoping to buy a home in 2025? You're not alone: According to a survey commissioned by NerdWallet and conducted online by The Harris Poll in November 2024, 15% of Americans plan to buy a home in the next 12 months. That is the highest share since we first asked that question in 2019 — it works out to about 39 million people.

Not all of those plans will pan out. In 2024, 4.06 million existing homes sold, according to the National Association of Realtors — the lowest number of sales since 1995.

That number doesn't include new construction. Per the U.S. Census, in 2024 about 1.63 million new homes were built. If inventory remains at around 6 million this year, there could be more than six interested buyers for each home for sale.

With so much demand for so few listings, home buyers are wise to make their home searches as broad as possible.

"It's crucial to focus on what truly matters if you are searching in a market with limited inventory," explains Jenna Stauffer, a real estate broker. "Define your non-negotiables — location, number of bedrooms and bathrooms, square footage, and key features — then be flexible on the rest."

Condition is one area where you might be flexible. NAR statistics show that in 2024, 23% of home buyers compromised on condition.

While that calls to mind homes that need work, you could also consider new construction versus existing homes. There are pros and cons to fixer-uppers versus turnkey properties, or to whether you buy or build a house.

Here's what you should know about each as you decide on the scope of your home search:

Buying a turnkey home

UPSIDES: All you need to do is move your stuff in — after, of



ROSS D. FRANKLIN — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Construction workers install a lumber roof at a new home build Tuesday, April 1, 2025, in Laveen, Arizona

course, going through the entire homebuying process of making a successful offer, getting a mortgage and closing on the home. A turnkey home also allows for the widest variety of financing options. Since you won't need to look for a niche loan type, you'll be able to comparison shop more mortgage lenders and focus on finding the best loan offer.

DOWNSIDES: With so little inventory on the market, existing homes that are in tip-top shape go fast.

You're more likely to face competition or possibly even a bidding war, and unlikely to get a deal. In 2024, a third of homes

sold went for their asking price — and 23% sold for above asking, according to the NAR.

PRO TIPS: To snag a turnkey home, act decisively. "If a property checks your must-have boxes and you're financially ready, be prepared to make an offer quickly," Stauffer says.

Have a mortgage preapproval in hand, and make sure that your real estate agent knows your budget as well as any contingencies you'd be willing to offer a seller. If homes are regularly selling above the listing price in your area, focus your search on properties priced slightly below what you're actually looking to spend.

Building a new home

UPSIDES: A new home built for you skips some steps in the buying process, since you're likely looking at a much shorter search and way less competition. If you're working with an independent contractor, you'll get to choose every last detail — and even if you're buying in a development, you might make the call on layout, surfaces and more. Another perk of new developments: The builder may offer incentives, like upgraded amenities or even an interest rate buydown, helping your budget go further.

DOWNSIDES: The timeline for

new construction can get derailed if there are issues with finding material or labor, so you may need to be flexible on your move date.

Whether it costs more to buy or build a house is also an open question.

Buying in a development may be relatively economical — or at least comparable to buying an existing home — but could limit your location options. Buying land and starting from the ground up may mean extra costs for securing access to water, electricity and other utilities.

In December 2024, the median price for a new construction home was \$427,000, according to



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Before taking on a major home renovation, you need to weigh the pros and cons of your project against your financial responsibilities and then make the right move for your family.

the National Association of Home Builders.

The median price for an existing home, per the NAR, was \$404,000.

PRO TIPS: Understand your financing options. If you're building the home, you'll need a construction loan to finance both the building phase and the completed home.

Construction loans can require higher down payments, and depending on the loan type, your lender may need to approve your builder or even have some level of oversight on the project. Financing a home in a development is

simpler, since the builder's covering construction costs. But you may have to pay a builder's deposit in addition to your down payment.

The builder may offer you financing, but you'll want to compare their interest rate and terms with other lenders.

Renovating a fixer-upper

UPSIDES: Buying a home that needs some work could potentially help you afford a property that's larger or in a more desirable neighborhood than your budget would otherwise allow.

"This is a moment where the

fixer upper is where you're probably going to find the most opportunity, as long as you know your numbers," says Kirsten Jordan, broker and team leader at Douglas Elliman Real Estate in New York City.

Renovating a home also gives you the chance to customize it to your needs and style, make energy-efficient upgrades or preserve the home's unique charm and character.

DOWNSIDES: Renovations are a lot tougher — and messier, and more time-consuming — than they look on TV. Whether you're hiring pros or doing the work

yourself, you'll likely be spending considerable time and money after closing day.

"One of the main things that's important to note is, okay, how much is it really going to cost to do the work to get this home to the level I'd like it to be," Jordan says. "Can I do most of the renovation before I move in, or is this something I'm going to do over time?"

You may need to hold down multiple housing situations if the home can't be lived in; even if it can, you could endure inconveniences or discomfort as you wait for projects to wrap up.

PRO TIPS: Know what you're getting into. Work with an experienced home inspector to determine what needs to be addressed.

You may also want to do a walk-through with a contractor, which could give you a more concrete idea of the scope of the work and the potential cost.

Most contractors will charge a consultation fee that's refunded if they're hired.

You might consider financing the purchase with a renovation loan, which is a mortgage that covers the costs of repairs as well as the home's price.

GARDENING

SQUEAKY CLEAN: HOW TO GET YOUR TOOLS PREPPED FOR SPRING PLANTING

By **Betty Cahill**

For *MediaNews Group*

"If the only tool you have is a hammer, it's hard to eat spaghetti," says David Allen, a productivity consultant and writer. Could this analogy apply to using the right garden tool to effectively complete outdoor tasks?

No doubt, and taking it further: It is time to get tools in their best working condition for the new season.

Take a good hard look at your garden tool kit and then make some decisions.

Are your bypass pruners making sharp cuts or are they doing harm by crushing the branch?

If your trowel handle bends like a paper drinking straw when digging, then a new, hardworking one will change your garden life for the better.

Maybe your tools just need a bit of spit and polish and a good sharpening session. And after your decisions are made, how about spaghetti for dinner?

Clean and disinfect

Improve tool performance with a good cleaning. Just like washing our hands to remove germs and bacteria, we need to do the same for our garden tools.

No need to spread any harmful pathogens from last year to established plants in the garden and new ones that will be planted soon.

And when referring to tools, the list includes plant trellises, cages, stakes, accessories and containers

(they'll need cleaning and disinfecting, too).

Some trellises and containers may not be easy to clean because of location and size, so do the best you can.

Generally, wooden containers naturally repel fungi and bacteria. Where possible, wash with soap and water, rinse well and let dry.

Clean each tool well before disinfecting. Begin by giving each a strong blast of water to remove caked-on dirt and debris.

Pruners can easily be disassembled by removing the nut or screws that hold the blades together, then the spring coil will slip off. (Keep track of the pieces.) Soaking in warm, liquid dish soap is all you need; use a stiff brush for hard-to-reach places. If there's dried-on residue or sap, soak longer in soapy water or try a commercial product like Scrubbing Bubbles, which also disinfects.

Read and follow label cautions associated with commercial products. Rinse well with water after cleaning and dry.

Lysol — or similar, store-brand versions — works well as a disinfectant for possible fungi, bacteria and viruses on tools. Simply place the tool in a bucket or box and spray all sides, or opt for the easy-to-use wipes. When finished, let the tools air dry.

Avoid using bleach products to disinfect pruners and other sharp-edged cutting tools.

Bleach is very corrosive and can make pits in some



PHOTOS BY BETTY CAHILL — SPECIAL TO THE DENVER POST

The list of gardening tools to clean each season includes shovels, rakes, pitchforks, plant trellises, cages, stakes, accessories and containers.



Left: Just like washing our hands to remove germs and bacteria, we need to do the same for our garden tools.

Below: All clean: Soaking garden tools in warm, liquid dish soap is typically all you need; use a stiff brush for hard-to-reach places.

Rust can be removed a couple of ways: Soak exceptionally rusty tools in a jar or can of white vinegar for several hours or overnight. For shovels, soak a large rag with vinegar, wrap it around the shovel blade, cover with plastic and let it sit overnight. Use a wire brush after soaking to remove any residual rust. After soaking any tool, wash with soapy water, rinse and dry. Also try using some elbow grease with sandpaper or steel wool for rust.



metal tools.

However, diluted bleach (one part bleach, nine parts water) can be used on rakes, shovels, spades, trellises, tomato cages and containers.

Undiluted 70% or higher concentration rubbing alcohol works well on small hand tools and pruners, although when used on tools to prune out fire blight, it might not be as effective.

Rust can be removed a couple of ways: Soak exceptionally rusty tools in a jar or can of white vinegar for several hours or overnight. For shovels, soak a large rag with vinegar, wrap it around the shovel blade, cover with plastic and let it sit over-

night. Use a wire brush after soaking to remove any residual rust. After soaking any tool, wash with soapy water, rinse and dry.

Also try using some elbow grease with sandpaper or steel wool for rust.

Sharpening

Want superior experiences preparing a meal and maintaining a garden? Assuming your answer is yes, both disciplines require sharp tools.

The easiest way to sharpen is to take your clean and sanitized tools to a reputable garden center, hardware store, small business or friend who specializes in sharpening gardening tools. Prices should

be reasonable.

For DIY, a carbide file is great for smaller tools like pruners, loppers and small snipper shears. A mill file works well on shovel blades.

Once all your tools are cleaned, disinfected, and sharpened, give them a wipe down with some vegetable oil, which will help prevent rust through the season. Bypass pruners will benefit from a drop or two of hardware lubricant (like 3-In-One oil).

Tool tips

■ During the outdoor gardening season, some smart gardeners brightly paint the

handle of their trowels, making them easier to spot in the garden.

■ A pocketed apron is handy for holding and carrying tools around while gardening. Plastic tubs decked out with a saddle bag to hold all sorts of tools (and perhaps an adult beverage for later in the day) are also popular.

■ Take advantage of these warm late winter days into spring and do the work outside while soaking up some healthy vitamin D. Clean tools, sharpened pruners? Life is good.

Betty Cahill writes about gardening. Visit her site at gardenpunchlist.blogspot.com for more gardening tips.

INTERIOR



PHOTOS BY SARAH L. VOISIN — THE WASHINGTON POST

Many houseplants are simple to propagate and share with friends.

GREEN THUMB: HOW TO GROW HOUSEPLANTS WITHOUT EVER HAVING TO BUY ONE

By Nicolás Rivero
The Washington Post

Houseplants have gotten something of a bad rap lately, with climate advocates citing the energy-intensive greenhouses they're grown in, the harmful emissions produced from shipping them long distances and the environment-depleting peat they are often packed in.

But there's a greener — and cheaper — way to expand your plant collection. Local plant swaps offer a chance to trade plants

and get tips for how to care for them. You may also have a friend, neighbor, relative or co-worker who has the plant you want and will give you a cutting free.

"They're the ultimate renewable resource," said Chad Husby, chief explorer at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. "You can take one piece of a plant and get a whole new plant. It's miraculous."

Some species can be grown from saved seeds, divided bulbs or offshoots. But many common house plants can be propagated by cutting. Here's what to know before you

break out the shears:

When is the best time to take cuttings?

Spring is the ideal time. Plants respond best to pruning at the beginning of their growing season, and cuttings intended for propagation have the best chance of thriving when there's plenty of warmth and sunlight to fuel quick root growth.

After you cut, be prepared to move quickly to the next steps.

"Once you take a cutting, it basically has to rely on whatever sugars it has stored until it can start to ... generate roots to supply leaves with nutrients," Husby said. "You're working against time. The more you extend the process, the more chance there is your cutting will get exhausted or infected because it's in a weakened state."

Where should you cut your plant?

Snip right above a growth node: one of the knobby joints along a plant's stem that leaves or buds grow from. You don't want

to cut so close that you damage the node — that's where a new branch will form. But any stem beyond that point will wither, so you don't want to leave too much, either.

You should also think about the cutting you're creating. Ideally, you'll have a few leaves near the tip of the stem, which will collect sunlight and give the plant energy to grow roots.

"Save the tips because those are the best things to root," said Tim Pollak, plant production manager at the Chicago Botanic Garden. "They'll grow faster than some of the older parts of the stem."

You also want to leave one or two bare nodes at the bottom of the cutting that new roots can grow from. You might have to cut off leaves at the bottom to clear space for roots to grow.

How to root a plant in water

Some hardy plant cuttings root well in water, but most do better in soil. It depends on the species, so you should look up what works best for your plant.

"There are some plants, for instance a pothos, begonia or coleus, that, given enough time and the right conditions, they'll root on a wet floor," said Marc Hachadourian, director of glasshouse horticulture at the New York Botanical Garden. "They really don't need much to propagate."

If you're rooting in water, your job is pretty easy: Just fill a glass or jar with enough water to cover the growth node you'd like to grow roots from, and then change the water every two or three days.

Soon you should see pale roots starting to poke out. When the roots are an inch or two long, you're ready to put your new plant in a pot with soil.

How to root a plant in soil

If you're rooting your cutting directly in soil, you'll need to dote on it a bit more. Fill a pot with dirt, use your fingers to clear a hole and place the cutting so that the lower nodes roots will grow from are covered with soil.

Over the next few days, you'll have to keep the soil moist, but not too wet. Using a pot with drainage holes helps avoid overwatering. You can raise the humidity around your cutting by

misting it a few times a day — or you can place a clear plastic bag over the plant and its pot to create a miniature greenhouse. Just keep it out of direct sun to avoid overheating.

You won't be able to see the roots grow beneath the dirt, but you can look for signs they've arrived. If you see new shoots or leaves growing above the soil, the plant has probably rooted. Or you can take a more hands-on approach.

"Just take your fingers and right at the base of the stem, where it meets the soil, you give it a little tug — lightly," Pollak said. "If you feel there's some resistance, that means it's probably starting to root."

At that point, your cutting is established in its new home and you can start treating it like any other houseplant. Don't worry if some of the old leaves fall off.

"As long as new leaves continue to grow, you're going to be fine," Husby said.

Other propagation techniques

Everything you've just read about taking stem cuttings and rooting them in water or soil will work for most common houseplants. But there are other propagation methods.

Pothos will sometimes grow roots at the nodes along its long, trailing vines. You can bury these roots in a new pot while the vine is still attached to the mother plant, in a technique called "layering." Once the new roots are established, you can cut the vine and split the plant in two.

The succulent known as mother of thousands will grow fully formed baby plants, complete with leaves and roots, in a ring along the edge of its leaves, and drop them when they're ready to grow on their own.

"Some plants, like begonias, can be propagated from leaf cuttings," Hachadourian said. "If you did that with a monstera, you'd wind up with a dead leaf."

So, look up your particular plant before you start cutting. And if you want to learn much more about propagation, the botanists say, you may be able to find a hands-on class at a botanical garden, nursery, garden center or park near you.



Sharing houseplants with friends can help save money and cut down on waste from plants grown in nurseries across the country.

KITCHEN



PHOTO BY ADAM ALBRIGHT

In this kitchen by Amanda Reynal, a Roman shade in Schumacher Citrus Garden fabric steals the show.

10 AFFORDABLE WAYS TO JAZZ UP AN ALL-WHITE KITCHEN

By Dina Cheney

Special to The Washington Post

Like blue jeans and Colonial-style architecture, white kitchens are timeless — and given their popularity with developers and flippers, odds are high that you have one, whether you wanted it or not.

But according to the 2025 Kitchen Trends Report from the National Kitchen and Bath Association, these clean and classic spaces have fallen out of fashion. Many homeowners now crave kitchens with personality, shunning “sterile” white in favor of nature-based colors, like green, blue and

brown.

But that’s a shame. Like spare gallery walls, white kitchens can be ideal backdrops for self-expression. All it takes to avoid blandness is a few “pops of color, texture and personality,” Miami-based interior designer Ania Agárdy said in an email.

In a white kitchen, every surface offers an opportunity to punctuate your space, often at relatively low cost.

Here’s how:

Display beloved objects

If your Japanese teapots or vintage casserole dishes have been collecting dust,

consider showcasing them in your kitchen.

“You probably have accessories already tucked away in your cabinets, so check your inventory before you go hunting,” Florida-based Galey Alix of Galey Alix Design said in an email.

In her kitchen, she stacks cookbooks with attractive bindings and displays antique-style brass salt and pepper grinders she’s amassed over the years.

To avoid visual cacophony, stick to a palette, like the blue, red and pink color scheme Katherine Ormerod used for the platters, pitchers and vases she arranged on her blue kitchen shelves. Try placing

items in glass-fronted upper cabinets or hanging them on a wall.

Surprise with paint or wallpaper

For made-you-look playfulness, adorn the ceiling with colorful paint or wallpaper.

“This creates an unexpected yet elegant focal point,” Iowa-based Amanda Reynal of Amanda Reynal Interiors said in an email.

In the same way, you can designate an accent island or wall or spice up cabinet interiors. For a sophisticated and transporting accent wall, try installing removable mural wallpaper, like this bucolic land-



PHOTO BY ADAM ALBRIGHT

In this kitchen by Amanda Reynal, a Roman shade in Schumacher Citrus Garden fabric steals the show.

scape.

Brighten your backsplash

The backsplash is prime territory for making a splash design-wise. For an inexpensive (and removable) update, consider applying peel-and-stick wallpaper that gives the illusion of tile, said Ormerod, the author of “Your Not-Forever Home: Affordable, Elevated, Temporary Decor for Renters.” For a bit more of an investment, swap out your existing backsplash for real tile, like textured Moroccan Zellige.

Jazz up an appliance

Appliances are the workhorses of the kitchen, but they usually add nothing design-wise. One solution: Cover the surface of your fridge or dishwasher with a removable decal or magnet cover. For a bright, retro feel, consider vintage lemons or vintage floral dark botanical. Copper Vintage Rustic is more textured and industrial, while vintage painting is serene. If you choose a cover with a pattern, keep the other elements in your space relatively neutral to avoid visual overload.

Don't overlook furniture

In a clean white kitchen, bold or sculptural pieces can make a sizable impact. New York City-based Marina Hanisch lent her client's kitchen an industrial, artisanal feel by choosing wooden architect-style screw stools. You can also mix it up at your dining table, pairing colorful chairs with more neutral, traditional seating.

Add punch with pulls

Changing out drawer pulls and cabinet handles is a time-honored way to affordably update a kitchen. With white cabinets, colored or unusually shaped hardware (like these) can shift the vibe of the room.

“Swapping in unique cabinet pulls and integrating other bold metal accents can bring personality to a space and ensure it feels visually dynamic,” said Hanisch, of Marina Hanisch Interiors.

Choose an accent rug

One item can make such a difference. By adding a colorful, vintage Moroccan runner, Susan Galvani of Spruce Interior in Charleston, South Carolina, warmed up a client's otherwise neutral kitchen. Thanks to the rug plus a blue accent island, the space feels cozy and boho.

Install a funky fixture

A spiderlike, multi-pendant chandelier seems to crawl across the ceiling in a kitchen designed by Manhattan-based Rebecca Roberts of Method + Moxie. The ultra-modern installation wakes up the white and gray space. Similarly, the curvy wooden pendant lights Hanisch chose for a client's kitchen add an organic touch.

Wow with window treatments

In a kitchen Reynal designed for a client, a Roman shade in whimsical Schumacher Citrus Garden fabric steals the show. To tie the room together, Reynal applied its blue-green-yellow color palette throughout the space. She chose blue cushions for the counter stools and painted the island green.

Season with humor

As an experiment, add one playful decorative item, like a banana-shaped fruit bowl, retro school lunch wall sculpture, “Coffee First, People Later” print, or fruit refrigerator magnets. Then see if it improves your morning mood. This foray into “dopamine decor” might perk you up more than your coffee.



SPRUCE INTERIOR BY KATIE CHARLOTTE LYBRAND

A colorful Moroccan runner perks up this clean white kitchen by Susan Galvani.

INTERIOR

6 HACKS FOR KEEPING SHOE CLUTTER IN CHECK

By Jennifer Barger
Special to The Washington Post

In his Miami home, DJ Khaled displays his 10,000-plus pairs of sneakers in a library-like room with a sliding ladder — the better to reach high-tops and trainers on high shelves.

Kim Kardashian and her sibs store their hundreds of heels and tennis shoes in jumbo dressing rooms that are lit up and styled like boutiques.

Most of us possess far fewer shoes than these celebs.

But storing and organizing a single household's worth of flip-flops, running shoes, loafers, etc., still presents challenges.

"The most important thing is that your shoes have to be accessible — you won't wear what you can't see," says Lani Inlander, a personal stylist in D.C.

But that can devolve into a mess.

"So many people just have a heap of dirty shoes by the front door," says Shira Gill, a professional organizer in San Francisco who wrote "LifeStyled: Your Guide to a More Organized & Intentional Life."

Here's how Inlander, Gill and other pros recommend you keep your shoes organized and close at hand. Or is it foot?

Sort through your shoes

Before organizing, take inventory.

"I start any closet project with an edit and a purge," Gill says. "It's easier to or-

ganize less stuff."

Put all of your footwear in one place to survey what you have.

Then try on everything, perhaps with a buddy or family member on hand to weigh in.

"Ask yourself if they're still comfortable, if you ever wear them, and whether they even fit," says Detroit-based professional organizer Amelia Pleasant Kennedy. "If you aren't in love with them, it might be time for them to go."

Items you no longer want or need can be thrown away, donated, consigned at a secondhand store or sold online via Poshmark, the RealReal and other resale sites. Put damaged or worn shoes in a separate pile to determine whether they should be tossed or repaired.

"You'd be surprised about the things a good cobbler can do, from redyeing shoes to putting new soles on boots," Inlander says.

Get rid of the shoe boxes

The cardboard boxes shoes come in can be attractive and status-conveying — think the trademark burnt orange of Hermès or Tory Burch's pink and purple checkerboard pattern. "But if you keep shoes in their original boxes, you tend to forget what's inside," Inlander says.

Instead, display footwear on shelves or racks or swap cardboard boxes for clear plastic or fabric-covered boxes with drop-down fronts.



Shoe organization tips from Lani Inlander.

PHOTO BY LANI INLANDER

Tame the front door

Whether you're a shoes-on or shoes-off household, you'll need an organizational system by the front (and maybe back) door.

"Reserve the space by the door for just what you can store in an easy way," Gill says. "You probably don't want everyone seeing the dirty shoes you wear to walk the dog or run to the grocery store. Avoid a mountain of shoes."

She suggests a bench with cubbies, a basket or something that conceals footwear while keeping it handy. Gill had lockers built near her front door; Inlander has a simple bookcase tucked into a hallway near the door.

"Everyone in my family has a bin and a shelf and puts their shoes there when they get home" (at least in theory), Inlander says.

Create order in the closet

While you want to conceal shoes by the front door, you want to see them in your bedroom closet.

"Assess what makes the most sense in the space you have," says Caroline Solomon, a professional organizer in New York. "That might mean an over-the-door rack if space is at a premium, a shoe rack on the floor, or an Ikea bookcase that you place sneakers and sandals on."

Built-ins — either from a custom closet outfitter or via an adaptable system — give you multiple ways to stow shoes, and they can be tailored to how many pairs you own.

"If you have room, you can put in cubbies, drawers or shelves that angle out," Kennedy says.

You can even install glass-

fronted cabinets with interior lights, the better to show off those prized Louboutins.

Whatever system you decide on, it's easier to locate things quickly if you arrange shoes by type and color. Place pairs on shelves with the right toe and the left heel forward to conserve space.

"I sometimes store pairs of flat sandals on their sides with the soles facing each other," Inlander says. "You can squish them together and fit more in."

Be smart about gadgets

It can be tempting to hit the Container Store or Amazon and purchase every shoe rack, boot tree and light-up sneaker box you can find. But don't get carried away.

"It's more important to max-

imize your storage space than to get gadgets you have to fiddle with," Solomon says.

She and other organizers counsel using things you already have when possible.

Gill likes simple round baskets for corralling flats and sandals — just arrange pairs in a circle, toes up. Or repurpose an existing piece of furniture such as a vintage china cabinet or credenza. Inlander helped one client store her shoe collection in antique Asian armoires using clear acrylic cubbies.

The tall boot problem

You can store booties or short boots the same way you would shoes, but it's challenging to find space for taller pairs.

"You don't want the shaft of riding or over-the-knee boots to

fall over and crease," says Elizabeth Todd, owner of the Shoe Hive, a footwear boutique in Alexandria, Virginia. "I use cut-up pool noodles or the original packing material from the box to stuff the boot."

Inlander encourages clients to store tall boots on their sides, stuffed with foam boot trees in long cubbies.

There are multiple tall boot "solutions" on organizing websites, but most get low marks from closet pros. Seemingly ingenious hanging boot trees tend to malfunction and drop your boots on the floor. Tall boot racks, in which you place each boot upside down on a slender dowel, don't shape the shaft.

"You'd do better just rolling up magazines and sticking one in each boot," Gill says.



PHOTO BY ORGANIZED LIVING

Laura Cattano's closet, which has shoes neatly stacked and visible.



PHOTO BY ORGANIZED LIVING

Laura Cattano's closet uses IKEA cubes.

LAWN

THE LOW-MAINTENANCE, ECO-FRIENDLY LAWN THAT WILL STILL IMPRESS YOUR NEIGHBORS

By Michael J. Coren
The Washington Post

This year, a Tasmanian yard that hadn't been watered in 10 years and featured a dead brush-tail possum won the title of ugliest lawn in the world. The contest, organized by the island of Gotland in Sweden, rewards those who turn over their yards to nature to save water and change the world's perception of the ideal lawn.

It also raises an important question: Who wants an ugly lawn, really? An admirable, dedicated contingent embracing ugly lawns' ecological bona fides is willing to draw "disgusted glances from neighbors — and a round of applause from around the globe," as the contest organizers put it.

But far more people just want a nice yard that won't provoke their neighborhood homeowners association (HOA).

"If we're saying we're all going to have the ugliest landscape in the world, that's not going to catch on," insists Doug Tallamy, an entomologist at the University of Delaware who's proposing a different approach. "I'm trying to reduce the area of lawn and do it in an attractive way so you're not thrown out of your neighborhood."

Tallamy is part of a growing movement to create ecological Edens out of yards while keeping them palatable to society. Want an unruly meadow? Carve a path inviting you in. Planting a profusion of native trees and shrubs? Border it with a strip of manicured grass.

These subtle but crucial signals differentiate a mess from a "lawn." That might be enough to move wildlife conservation beyond public lands to the backyards — and even balconies — of millions of people, propagating tidy wildlands across the country.



JENNIFER HEFFNER FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Janet Crouch plants in her pollinator garden that's starting to grow at the beginning of spring. In a few months, the garden will be full of natural plants and flowers that attract pollinators.

"We need ecosystems to function everywhere, not just in parks and preserves," he argues.

Here's how to create a yard — or container garden — that's good for nature while making you the envy of your neighborhood:

What we've lost

Americans have transformed

95% of the natural landscapes in the country. Around half the Lower 48 states are now cities and streets, infrastructure such as airports and shopping centers, or isolated habitat fragments, with farms covering much of the other half.

Only about 13% of the United States enjoys some form of protection.

tection.

That's hardly enough to sustain wildlife. If nearly three-quarters of habitat is lost, ecologists say, then we're likely to lose three-quarters of species, as well. In just half a century, for example, a staggering 3 billion breeding adult birds, or nearly 30% of their populations, have disappeared.

To save America's biodiversity, Tallamy wants us to share the land. To do this, he's enlisting private owners of more than 83% of the United States to create what he calls "homegrown national parks" from tiny city plots to corporate campuses. He envisions turning over half of the 40 million acres of lawns in the United

States — an area roughly the size of New England — to imperiled native plants and trees, embracing what Aldo Leopold, widely regarded as a father of modern conservation, called the “land ethic.”

“We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us,” Leopold wrote in his 1949 book, “A Sand County Almanac,” popularizing the idea that healthy ecosystems are vital to humanity’s survival. “When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

That means restoring four ecological functions that healthy landscapes perform: nourish the food web, supply clean water, pull carbon out of the air, and feed and shelter native insects and pollinators.

“Lawns do none of them,” says Tallamy. But they could, on almost any scale, including a tiny side yard or even a container.

Imagine your yard as a buffet. Insects evolved over millions of years to feast on hundreds of regional cuisines made up of native plants from Florida to the Pacific Northwest.

Some, such as the monarch butterfly larvae, depend on a single endemic plant species. If all you have to offer are turf and ornamental plants, mostly from Asia and Europe, you might as well be growing AstroTurf.

That leaves insects and everything that depends on them — including the roughly three-quarters of all the flowering plants on Earth they pollinate — out of luck.

A 2019 study by Tallamy and others found hedgerows infested with invasive shrubs and trees supported 96 percent fewer caterpillars, by weight, than those dominated by natives.

Since so many animals eat caterpillars, says Tallamy, without them you have a failed food web.

Tidy wildlands that even the most conservative neighbor could celebrate could restore nature’s banquet table, and all the wildlife that relies on it, across U.S. cities and suburbs.

What the new yard could look like

The typical objection to “natural” yards and native plants boils down to one word: “messy,” says Haven Kiers, a landscape archi-



CAITLIN O'HARA FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Fairy dusters are among the native plants in the landscaping in the Dunbar Spring neighborhood in Tucson, Arizona. The neighborhood has planted 1,700 food-bearing native street trees and built basins to collect rainwater to irrigate endemic plants that attract pollinators.

tect at the University of California at Davis.

The public perception of lawns is binary: clipped and manicured or abandoned and ugly. Kiers is charting a third way, transforming her own scraggly grass lawn in Davis into an explosive profusion of native plants combined with a few ornamentals that people and pollinators love.

“It would be great if everyone planted only natives,” she says, “but I’m also dealing with a public that wants to do well and wants gardens to look good.”

So she’s designing native landscapes as formal gardens. Her students lay out elaborate botanical landscapes that draw on ordered garden styles while using only plants from the West.

Ironically, this may mean reintroducing them to Americans in a new light.

Our native plants such as poke-weed, American sweetgum and Virginia creeper are fixtures in formal gardens in Paris, and elsewhere in Europe. We just need to learn to love them as much they do.

The key is a landscape philosophy called “cues to care.” First introduced in a 1995 paper called “Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames,” it argued that intentionally designed elements — mowed grass margins, flowering plants with crisp edges or trimmed shrubs — should delineate larger “messy” wildness such as a meadow or prairie gardens. These signs of human presence make the landscapes socially acceptable while preserving their ecological value, which is often invisible.

Ultimately, the lack of social acceptance is what makes the “ugly” frame such a hard sell. Yards are not afterthoughts for most people. They are status symbols and artistic expressions. To make native landscapes acceptable, we need to marry human touch with ecological function.

How to create a tidy wildland

■ Take it one small patch at a time. Kiers recommends slowly replacing strips of lawn with na-

tive (or a few suitable ornamental) plants that can support pollinators and local fauna. For Kiers, the backyard is a work in progress. With each passing year, her grass recedes as her garden beds and natives grow.

And if you’re worried about HOA restrictions, most rules are about preserving property value. The “cues to care” mean your HOA may accept your native yard — or you can join your HOA to ensure it changes its rules.

HOAs are also losing their clout: a low-impact landscaping law passed in Maryland prevents homeowners associations from prohibiting environmentally friendly yards. Florida, Utah, Arizona, California and other states and cities have similar laws on the books or under consideration.

■ Go native, but no need to fear all ornamentals. Native plants will give you the biggest ecological bang for your buck. Typically, they won’t need water after they get established. Start by asking your native plant society or nursery. There’s one in every state, or search for master gar-

dener groups and extension services online in your area who can answer your questions (for free!).

Adding ornamentals to the mix can add appeal without losing much ecological value. “There’s so much pressure to only go native,” says Kiers. “That’s silly.” Just prioritize natives and avoid invasives.

■ Plant keystone species, feed the food web. These plants support the most wildlife. White oaks and relatives, for example, are exemplary trees for wildlife in 84% of U.S. counties. But every region is different so do your research. Homegrown National Park lists the top plants for your area.

And don’t forget to leave areas under trees and shrubs with leaves, logs or small native seedlings. More than 90% of the caterpillars drop off their host plant and need ground cover to finish their life cycle.

■ Spread seeds for an instant flower garden. Any clearing at the edge of a path, around a tree or even a sidewalk can become a thriving garden with a few seeds and some occasional watering. If you do buy potted plants, use small pots (1 gallon vs. 4 gallon), as the plants are more likely to thrive.

Don’t have a lawn? Plant a balcony or become a guerrilla gardener. Biodiversity can thrive on your balcony, terrace or rooftop. Containers are “refueling pit stops” for native pollinators, says Homegrown National Park. Large pots are best, and some perennial species will return year after year.

And there are plenty of forgotten spaces where a wildflower garden can take root — you don’t even need to own it. Throw a few “seed bombs” on bare ground, and after some initial watering, a native garden can bloom almost anywhere from a Brooklyn sidewalk to back alleys.

■ Express yourself. The natural world has a nearly infinite variety of species for you to grow into. After some trial and error, you may find yourself as more than a gardener, but the creator of your own tidy wilderness.

“The good news is that we can fix our ecological problems by indulging rather than sacrificing,” says Tallamy. “It has been very difficult to address environmental issues by asking people to give up something.”

AROUND THE HOUSE



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Natural wood garage doors create a sense of warmth and can set a home apart from others with steel doors, which tend to be the most popular garage door material.

5 RENOVATIONS THAT PROVIDE A STRONG RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Renovations that make homeowners and residents of a home happy are always worth the investment.

Though it's certainly true that projects that create more functional, usable space and add comfort and convenience are worth the price, such renovations are even more beneficial if they provide a good return on homeowners' financial investment. Returns are often cashed in when homeowners put their homes up for sale.

Each year, Remodeling magazine releases its "Cost vs. Value Report," which considers a wealth of data across the United States to determine which renovations return the highest percentage of homeowners' financial investment.

According to the "2024 Cost vs. Value Report," the following are five projects that provide a strong return on investment:

Garage door replacement

The average job cost for this project is slightly more than \$4,500 but the project is valued at \$8,751, providing an especially high 194% ROI.

Steel door replacement

Remodeling magazine notes that a steel entry door replacement is worth double what it was worth in 2023. This project offers a 188% ROI on an average investment of \$2,355.

Manufactured stone veneer

A manufactured stone veneer is a man-made product that appears as if it's natural stone. Many homeowners prefer manufactured stone veneer to natural stone because of the price, as the for-

mer is less expensive and easier to install, which means lower labor costs as well. The comparatively low cost of manufactured stone veneer is perhaps one reason why it averages a roughly 153% ROI on an average cost of just more than \$11,000.

Grand entrance upscale (fiberglass)

Few things are as awe-inspiring as an impressive entryway, and upgrading to a grand fiberglass entrance door provides a 97% ROI. Components of these entryways can vary, but Remodeling magazine notes the project may entail removing an existing entry door and cutting and reframing the opening for a larger with dual sidelights.

Minor kitchen remodel

According to the "2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study" from Houzz Research, kitchens were the most popular rooms to renovate in 2023. There's no denying the appeal of a newly renovated kitchen, and homeowners considering such a project may be happy to learn that a minor kitchen remodel that costs an average of around \$27,000 provides a 96% ROI. Bankrate.com notes that minor kitchen remodels typically keep the current kitchen design, size and layout intact, but these projects may involve painting walls, refreshing backsplash, replacing lighting and plumbing fixtures, and changing cabinet hardware and facades.

— Metro Editorial Services

AROUND THE HOUSE

SMALL RENOVATIONS THAT MAKE A BIG IMPACT

Homeowners may think they have to tear down walls or build room extensions to transform their homes with renovation projects. But small projects can yield impressive results, and that's something homeowners working with limited budgets can keep in mind.

There's no shortage of small projects that can change the look and feel of a home. Many of these undertakings can be achieved with a modest investment:

- **Front door replacement:** A new front door instantly improves curb appeal and can make a home more secure and energy-efficient. Painting the existing front door is an even smaller project that still offers appeal.

- **Lighting addition:** Whether a homeowner enlarges a window or adds skylights, natural light can produce incredible results. Investing in new lighting can feel like expanding a space without pushing out walls.

- **Kitchen and bath fixture upgrades:** Faucets and door pulls are used every day. Swapping existing fixtures for something a little more modern can unify spaces and provide subtle changes that enhance these popular spaces.

- **Wood floor restoration:** Scuffing and scratches can adversely affect the pristine look of a natural wood floor. Homeowners can polish a floor to restore its shine. A professional service will sand down and refinish older floors at a fraction of the cost of a new floor installation.

- **Exterior lighting:** Lighting isn't just important inside. A welcoming glow in the yard is awe-inspiring. There are many energy-efficient lighting options, including ones that do not need to be hard-wired to the circuitry inside the home.

- **Staircase renovation:** Coordinate the staircase to the style in the home with a decorative carpet runner. A secure runner is attractive and can help reduce slipping down the stairs. Tighten shaky railings or replace them while upgrading the stair treads.

- **Interior paint:** Change the color of walls, doors, cabinets or even furniture with paint. All homeowners need is a paint color that inspires them and a little bit of time.

- **Replace outlet covers:** Upgrade outlet covers with screwless options. Screwless plates for outlets and light switches can make walls look more sleek.

- **Entry organizer installation:** Banish clutter from the home by catching it at the door. An entry organizer with spaces for shoes, coats, backpacks, and shopping bags can be eye-catching and functional.

- **Carpets cleaning:** Soiled carpets can look drab and dingy. Homeowners can rent carpet-cleaning machines or hire services to revitalize carpets with a deep cleaning.



FILE PHOTO

AROUND THE HOUSE



MARY CONLON — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Weighted blankets on display in a Saatva mattress showroom in New York, Dec. 4, 2024.

HOW TO MAKE A HOME MORE COZY

The meaning of the term “cozy” varies as it pertains to home decor.

For some, cozy may mean intimate spaces with lots of quilts and throws. For others, cozy could indicate bright and airy spaces enhanced by plenty of fresh foliage.

Regardless of how they define cozy, homeowners typically want their homes

to be inviting and comfortable.

With that in mind, here are some ways to impart a cozy vibe to any living space:

- Make use of a fireplace. Flames lapping wood (or faux wood in the event of gas-powered fireplaces) can put anyone in a tranquil state of mind. Fireplaces add instant ambiance and make great places for

people to congregate and engage in conversation. During warmer months when the fire isn’t blazing, decorative candles can be lit to mimic the same feel.

- Add texture in the design. Texture can be anything from a raised pattern on wallpaper to a knotty area rug to a mosaic piece of artwork. A home with texture

tends to create cozier impressions than one with all sleek and smooth surfaces.

- Enjoy a soft rug. Although many design experts say hardwood floors or laminate options are easier for allergies and keeping a home clean, a soft rug underfoot can be welcoming. Rather than wall-to-wall carpeting, place area rugs in spots



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Certain trends have emerged among fireplace fans in recent years.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WEST ELM

that can use some cozying up, such as beneath beds and even under the dining table.

- **Light candles.** The warm, flickering light of candles adds cozy vibes in spades. According to The Spruce and Paula Boston, a visual merchandiser for Festive Lights, candles can be used throughout a home to create instant atmosphere. Exercise caution with candles and fully extinguish them before retiring for the evening.

- **Update bedding for the season.** Crisp and light cotton and linen are cozy materials when the weather is warm. But when the temperature starts to dip, flannel or jersey bedding makes

a bed that much more inviting, says Real Simple.

- **Invest in lots of pillows.** Pillows can instantly make a spot more cozy, whether it's the living room sofa or an outdoor lounging nook. Look for materials that are durable for the space in which they're being used.

- **Think about warm lighting.** The transition from incandescent light bulbs to halogen and LED is beneficial from an environmental standpoint. However, LEDs illuminate with a more stark, blue light that can seem clinical in home spaces. Look for bulbs where the "temperature" can be customized. The more the color spectrum leans toward warm light,

the more cozy a space will feel. This can be enhanced by putting some lights on dimmer switches, and toning down the brightness as needed.

- **Install a bookshelf.** Even for those who are strict devotees of e-readers, a shelf full of actual books interspersed with some well-placed knickknacks can make a room feel more cozy. Books add texture, the feel of hallowed halls and libraries, and visual appeal.

— *Metro Editorial Services*

Right: Macomb's Matt Busch hangs out in his home/studio and library.

GINA JOSEPH — MEDIANEWS GROUP



LAUNDRY

FRONT VS. TOP LOADERS: IS ONE TYPE OF WASHING MACHINE BETTER?

By Laura Daily

Special to The Washington Post

Washing machines come with more bells and whistles than you can count: different rinse cycles, built-in sensors and fancy apps, to name a few. Before you can even think about those things, though, you have to figure out whether you want a front- or top-loading machine.

So, how to choose? “Your top considerations should be lifestyle, space, needs and ergonomics,” says Stephen Hughes, owner of Mr. Appliance.

Here’s a look at the advantages and drawbacks for both types of washers, along with some maintenance and care tips.

Front-loaders

Pros:

- Use less water. For those with low-production water sources, such as a well, who live in drought-prone areas or who just want to conserve water, these machines use only about 10 to 15 gallons per cycle. That is 30% to 40% less than a standard top-load unit and 25% to 30% less than a high-efficiency one, Hughes says.

- Gentle on fabrics. The drums use a tumbling motion to clean, repeatedly lifting clothes and dropping them back in the water. This action, coupled with the lack of an agitator, helps minimize wear and tear on fabric, says Hal Strong, marketing manager for BSH Home Appliances, which manufactures washers and dryers, including Bosch.

- Ergonomic. It’s easier to move your load from the washer to the dryer when both have a front door, says Adam Whobrey, head of product management for LG Home Appliances. If bending and squatting is challenging for you, consider adding a pedestal to raise the machine 8 to 12 inches.

- Shorter dry time. They spin 10% to 20% faster than a traditional top-loader. “That higher spin speed extracts more water from textiles,” Whobrey says, meaning they require less time in the dryer.

- Fits in tight spaces. They are designed to be space savers, Strong says. Stack a



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL CONNECTION

dryer on top of a front-loader to conserve valuable floor space. Several companies even manufacture models designed to fit in closets or other tight quarters.

Cons:

- Prone to odors. The door forms a tight seal to prevent water leakage. That dark, cool environment and the limited air circulation create the perfect petri dish for mold. “The biggest complaint from cus-

tomers is about mold and mildew making their clothes smell bad,” Hughes says. First-generation machines were especially susceptible. More recent models are engineered to use high-efficiency detergent, which reduces the chance of mildew building up, and some brands have mold-resistant gaskets.

- Heavy. If you have a second-floor laundry room, ensure the floor is structurally

sound and can support the weight, Hughes says. These machines typically weigh 150 to 300 pounds (compared with 120 to 180 for a top-loader). And when they’re spinning 20 to 40 pounds of wet clothes at 72 mph, they can shake your home.

- The front door. Typically, it’s hinged on the left side, opening from the right. Before buying one, make sure you have enough space for the door to fully open.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL CONNECTION

Top-loaders

Pros:

- Deep cleans. They use an agitator or the friction of clothes rubbing against one another to scrub laundry and remove dirt and stains. This heavy-duty cleaning power is good for people with an active lifestyle or kids or for those who love to garden or have a job that leaves clothes heavily soiled, Hughes says.
- Odor-free. Even when the lid is closed, they aren't airtight. Natural air flow practically eliminates the growth of mold and mildew.
- Easy to load. Just drop in laundry. No bending or

squatting required.

- Longer life. The average traditional machine lasts 10 to 15 years without major repair; an HE version's life span averages between seven and 10 years, Hughes says. That's two to three years longer than a typical front-load machine.

Cons:

- Shortens fabric life. The deep-cleaning agitator action means your laundry takes a beating. You're more likely to find frayed edges on towels and pillowcases or stretched out elastic waistbands. Even agitator-free models may have edges on the drum that can snag fabric.

- Unloading can be

tough. As easy as they are to load, they require a deep dive to reach the bottom when removing laundry, Strong says.

- Not everything may get washed. We're all guilty of occasionally overstuffing our washer. Models without agitators gain extra space, but that's deceiving. When tightly packed laundry doesn't have the room to tumble, the result may be uneven distribution of detergent and water. In some cases, you may even find items that didn't get wet or cleaned.

- Require more space. They can't be stacked so they need more floor space if you're pairing them with

a dryer. Also, any cabinets or shelving above the unit could impede the lid from fully opening.

Maintenance and care

Regardless of which type of machine you choose, you need to properly maintain it. Here are some tips from Ocean Van, owner of Coco Laundry.

Front-load machines

- Remove washed clothes promptly so they don't serve as a breeding ground for bacteria.
- Wipe the inside door gasket and glass dry between laundry sessions.
- If you spot mold, dampen a cloth with house-

hold bleach and lay it on the gasket for about 15 minutes, or until it loosens. Then wipe off the mold and wash away excess bleach with hot water.

- Gently pull on the rubber door seal to remove debris behind it.

▪ Pull out and clean the dispenser drawer with a soft brush and warm water.

- Flush the detergent compartments with warm water after each use.

▪ Leave the front door ajar so air can circulate, allowing the drum to dry completely.

- At the lowest point in the machine, you'll find the drain pump. Follow manufacturer directions for

monthly cleaning.

Top-load machines

- Wipe residue or dust from the bottom of the drum and around the lid with a microfiber cloth and warm water after each laundry session.

▪ At least once a month, pour vinegar and baking soda into the machine or add a product such as Af-fresh or Washer Magic, then run a cleaning cycle or use the hottest cycle.

- Avoid overloading the machine to reduce wear on the agitator and other components. Most top-load washers have a line or mark indicating maximum height to load.

BATHROOM

TUB TIME: FEATURES TO CONSIDER FOR A RELAXATION-THEMED BATHROOM REMODEL

Homeowners want to view their homes as a respite from all that goes on outside their doors. Indeed, turning a home into a residents-only retreat can ensure everyone looks forward to walking through the front the door at the end of the day.

One of the more popular ways to turn a home into one's own personal retreat is to upgrade the bathroom.

A renovated bathroom can completely transform how individuals feel about their homes.

The following are some features to consider when remodeling a bathroom with relaxation in mind:

- **Open shower:** An open shower is a visually stunning addition to any bathroom. Such showers give a bathroom a more open look, thanks in part to the fact that these modern features do not feature a door or require the use of a shower curtain.

The result is a clean look that many people associate with a luxury hotel.

When speaking with a contractor about an open shower install, homeowners can ask about a half-wall to safeguard against water splashing out of the shower. In addition, a heat lamp can help ensure residents stay warm until they're ready to leave the bathroom.

- **Heated features:** Additional features to keep everyone calm and warm can be considered when upgrading the bathroom. Radiant flooring can en-

sure everyone's toes remain toasty, and the installation of such a feature can eliminate the need for floor mats and bath mats that some homeowners may not like.

Commit further to the heat theme with a heated towel rack, which is another feature associated with luxury hotels that can be just as enjoyable at home.

- **Soaking tub:** An open shower creates an instant feeling of luxury, but few things are more suggestive of relaxation than a soaking tub.

A long day at school or the office or a day when winter winds are howling outside is made much better with a good a soak.

The National Kitchen & Bath Association notes that luxury bathrooms featuring soaking tubs are wildly popular, and that vaunted status is undoubtedly due to the relaxing benefits of a good soak.

- **Skylight:** Even if the goal of a luxury bathroom is to leave the outside world outside, allowing some natural light inside is a great way to add a little extra calm to the room.

Floor-to-ceiling windows may seem appealing in brochures or advertisements, but such features do not create the sense of privacy many people prefer in their bathrooms.

One or two skylights can create that sense of privacy and still allow for natural light to enter the room, making this an op-



PHOTO BY TRAVIS RICHARDSON

Drawing the eye upward with tall mirrors can open up a small, cramped bathroom.



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One of the more popular ways to turn a home into one's own personal retreat is to upgrade the bathroom. A renovated bathroom can completely transform how individuals feel about their homes.

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Above: The bathroom floor deserves constant cleaning because staphylococcus, coliforms and E. coli can lurk there.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

Left: A renovated bathroom at the Carriage Place apartments in Pontiac.

COURTESY, PONTIAC HOUSING COMMISSION

Bathroom

FROM PAGE 24

tion that provides the best of both worlds.

Organizational tips for bathrooms

Certain areas of a home may initially garner less attention than others. This often is the case with small washrooms, sometimes called powder rooms or guest bathrooms. Despite their utilitarian nature, bathrooms can often benefit from some better organization.

Apart from a vanity and possibly a medicine cabinet, many bathroom layouts tend to be pretty sparse in terms of storage. So it is up to homeowners to introduce more storage and organizational function.

▪ **Over-toilet shelving:** Freestanding units are available from many different retailers, but they may lack aesthetic appeal. Homeowners can install open shelves above the toilet that coordinate with the style of the home.

Use them to store extra towels or display decorative items.

▪ **Streamlined containers:** Invest in coordinating storage containers (clear are preferable) so that all items can be uniformly put away. First sort through all items to determine which size containers are necessary and how many are required.

▪ **Conceal toilet paper:** Homeowners want to have bath tissue on hand, but simply placing it near the toilet can look cluttered or unsightly. Use decorative baskets to house one or two extra rolls and place on shelving or on the toilet tank itself.

▪ **Freestanding cabinet:** Those lucky enough to have linen closets in their bathrooms can keep everything behind closed doors. In small bathrooms this may not be possible.

However, a freestanding cabinet, similar to a kitchen pantry cabinet, can be used if there is space for it. Store all of the linens and other items inside.

— *Metro Editorial Services*



Improve your wellness with affordable bathroom upgrades.



Half bathroom in home.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RE — MAX FIRST

PLANNING

HOW TO KEEP KIDS SAFE DURING A HOME RENOVATION PROJECT

Home renovation projects are significant undertakings.

Some projects are simple and do not require residents to adjust much, if at all. But larger projects can take several weeks or even months, and such renovations pose a unique challenge, particularly for homeowners who have young children.

Children are curious by nature, and that curiosity can be dangerous during home renovations.

Homeowners preparing to renovate their homes can keep these safety strategies in mind to protect their children during the project.

- Let contractors know there are children in the house. Keeping kids safe can be a collective effort that involves homeowners and the contractors working in their homes.

On the day contractors arrive, remind the project leader there are kids in the house and request that he or she let staff know there will be curious youngsters around.

Contractors can seal off rooms being worked on at the start of each day, and then do so again before leaving for the night.

Many contractors have children of their own at home, so if they know youngsters are in the house they might be especially mindful of safety and less likely to leave tools or potentially harmful debris out overnight.

- Inform children certain areas are now off limits.

Parents can inform and routinely remind children that spaces being renovated are off limits until the project is complete. Explain why it's important that everyone in the house, including

adults, must respect this rule.

Of course, kids don't always listen to Mom and Dad, so this step likely won't guarantee kids will steer clear of sealed off areas.

But explaining to kids why they need to avoid the areas can be more effective than just telling them to avoid project spaces.

- Set a good example. It can be tempting to peak in on spaces being renovated when contractors go home for the day, but parents should know children may be watching them.

If you're curious about the progress, ask the project manager to see a space during the day while children are at school. If it's summertime and kids are home, you can still ask, but do so with your children so they won't think you're being sneaky, which will only add to their curiosity.

- Turn off electricity in rooms being renovated when contractors go home. Speak with your contractor and ask if it's alright to turn off the power to rooms being worked on at the end of each day. If so, this can remove the risk of kids sneaking into spaces and turning on power tools at night or getting hurt while poking around exposed electrical wires.

- Hire a cleaning service once the project is complete.

Once the job is finished, hire a professional cleaning service to clean all areas that were worked on. This increases the chances that small but potentially harmful remnants, such as nails or staples, are gone before kids start using the renovated spaces.

— Metro Editorial Services

Children are curious by nature, and that curiosity can be dangerous during home renovations.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

BEDROOM

'GOING ALL OUT FOR KIDS' SPACES'



PHOTO BY SUSIE BRENNER

Benjamin Moore Shell Pink

THE BEST BEDROOM PAINT COLORS, ACCORDING TO PRO DESIGNERS

By Kathryn O'Shea-Evans
Special to The Washington Post

When I was in third grade, I volunteered my stepdad to paint my bedroom ceiling with a blue sky and puffy white clouds (he happily complied).

Childhood bedrooms are made for creating your own little dreamland as you begin to dip your toes into the wider world.

Now that I have kids, I realize that the full-nest period passes in the blink of an eye. That's why designers encourage parents to go ahead and indulge them while you can.

"Going all out for kids' spaces is really important," said designer Maggie Griffin. "I think it shows that they matter, that their spaces really matter. I want them to love where they are and be excited when they have people over or they walk into

their room and it's first set up."

It's a great opportunity to give your kid some agency.

Even if it's not a color you would choose, paint is a short-term relationship.

"I don't think it has to be a lifetime commitment — you will have to repaint in five years no matter what," said designer Jess Knauf. "So might as well make it specific to wherever they are in their aesthetic

choices at this phase of life."

That said, you have to spend plenty of time in that room, too, so it's okay to push back a bit on their whims; Ninja Turtle puce green isn't for everyone.

Here, designers share paint colors that achieve the rare trifecta of designer, parent and child stamps of approval:



PHOTO BY SUSIE BRENNER

“I don’t think it has to be a lifetime commitment — you will have to repaint in five years no matter what. So might as well make it specific to wherever they are in their aesthetic choices at this phase of life.”
— Designer Jess Knauf

Left: Benjamin Moore silver cloud

Below left: Benjamin Moore Bright and early styled by Natalie Warady.

Below: Benjamin Moore Adriatic Sea designed by Coraline Kopp interior designs.



PHOTO BY AARON COLUSSI



PHOTO BY RIKKI SNYDER

Paint

FROM PAGE 28

Benjamin Moore Sapphire Ice

"I try to let rooms reflect the kids' personalities," said Gideon Mendelson, a designer based in New York City. "I'm all for color, and I'm all for something a little more neutral if a kid needs that. Every kid's a little different."

In this bedroom, Benjamin Moore's Sapphire Ice feels like a cloudless July sky.

"This was a kid who loves planes, trains and automobiles, so to speak. So we went a little bit more playful there, a little more thematic," he said. "The track on the ceiling was actually a plastic decal that you can remove. And we found these hubcap clocks that represent different time zones."

Farrow & Ball Dead Salmon

Even for Farrow & Ball, a British paint brand famous for its unexpected color names, the idea of "Dead Salmon" shocks — and doesn't exactly conjure sugar and spice and everything nice.

Yet the earthy, deep pink color really spoke to designer Michael Hilal's young client. "For this dreamy girl's room, we wanted to create a space that she could grow into," Hilal, who is based in San Francisco, said in an email. Instead of going for a typical pink, they paired this shade with a bed in the same color and some lively art by Elise Ferguson for a decidedly grown-up look.

Benjamin Moore Silver Cloud

Knauf selected Benjamin Moore's Silver Cloud for a young boy who loves Americana.



LAUREN EDITH ANDERSEN — SEN CREATIVE

Farrow and Ball Dead Salmon designed by Michael Hilal.

"It just reminded me of the sky," she said. "I think kids' rooms should be light and airy and not too serious. And I thought it was complementary to the red, white and blue without being too serious at all."

Pratt and Lambert Pink Puff

When designer Christine Markatos Lowe was searching for just the right shade of pink for a bedroom with lots of natural light, she set-

tled on Pratt and Lambert's Pink Puff. (Pratt and Lambert's paint colors are now sold under Valspar's label. Lowe says Valspar's Shell Pink is the best match.)

"This soft shade of pink bounces off the white ceil-

ing color and gives the whole room a rosy glow," the designer, based in Santa Monica, California, said in an email. "Rather than selecting a saturated color, this hint of pink does the trick and allows for more saturated tones in the fabrics and furnishings to pop against the wall."

Benjamin Moore Antique Pewter

One of Griffin's sons loves green, "but I really didn't feel inclined to paint his room emerald green or Kelly green or grass green," she said. "I found this cool shade of green-gray-blue that I felt like would really grow with him."

That color: Benjamin Moore's Antique Pewter, which has long been one of her favorites. "I have used it in almost every client project in some way. ... It's the most beautiful shade of eucalyptus green that has green in there and blue depending on the light," she said. "And I just loved that it gave the space so much more depth in the room."

Benjamin Moore Shell Pink

Knauf went with Benjamin Moore's Shell Pink in this bedroom for two "pink-obsessed" sisters, to coordinate with the paper doll dresses they made with their grandmother that hang on the wall.

"It's still subtle and glowy and charming without being Pepto Bismol," she said. "It checked all the boxes for everybody." Another sweet touch: Heirloom furniture from their great-grandparents' home. "Those were the beds [her father] slept on as a child, and we recovered them to be more appropriate for these two very fun and active little girls," Knauf said.

Benjamin Moore Brewster Gray

Griffin's 8-year-old son

"loves his dinosaurs," she said. To create the perfect backdrop for displaying them, she went with Benjamin Moore's Brewster Gray, a soothing shade of blue that felt a little more unexpected.

"We see a lot of icy blues, pale blues, and then of course a navy," she said. "This one just felt that much more exciting."

Benjamin Moore Adriatic Sea

If you want to go bold, as in this room done in Benjamin Moore's Adriatic Sea, consider using it in smaller doses. "I love a saturated blue, but in this little boy's room I wanted a light, crisp quality to balance all the primary colors," designer Caroline Kopp said in an email.

"Painting the wall blue part way up the wall (stopping around eye level) and doing a clear white across the top of the space gives a brightness to the room and pops out the windows, which are also in blue."

The white — Benjamin Moore's Chantilly Lace — on the upper wall, crown molding and ceiling makes the ceiling feel higher, said Kopp, who is based in Westport, Connecticut. "You could use this approach to cut the intensity of any color you are looking at using," she added. "I've also seen it done with two contrasting colors and it looks super cool that way too."

Benjamin Moore Bright and Early

Knauf used Benjamin Moore's Bright and Early to achieve a classic Americana look in this room shared by two brothers.

"What's more fun than red, white and blue, and some denim?" she said. "The paint color is not too babyish; I would use it in an adult room as well."

The trim, in Benjamin Moore's Denim Wash, adds contrast.



Benjamin Moore
Antique Pewter
designed by Maggie
Griffin Design.
PHOTO BY BRIAN BIEDER



PHOTO BY MANOLO LANGIS

Pratt & Lambert Pink Puff designed by Christine Markatos.



PHOTO BY BRIAN BIEDER

Benjamin Moore Brewster Gray designed by Maggie Griffin Design.



PHOTO BY ERIC PIASECKI — OTTO

Benjamin Moore's Sapphire Ice

PLANNING

HOW TO MAKE RENOVATION PROJECTS GO SMOOTHLY

Homeowners are spending big bucks on home renovations.

According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, home improvement project spending continues to increase.

It's predicted to have gone from \$472 billion spent in 2022 to \$485 billion in 2024.

Those targeting a specific home renovation likely know there is much that goes into the process from start to finish.

Patience is a requisite virtue with any remodel, as even a thoroughly conceptualized plan can encounter a few bumps along the way.

Although there is no way to completely remove renovation-related obstacles, there are ways to make projects go more smoothly, including:

- Establish a clear plan from the beginning. Now is not the time to be on the fence about details. A vision for the renovation is essential, and should include details about layout, materials, colors and design.

- Manage your expectations. Again, this speaks to a need for patience with a project, but also involves flexibility. Being too rigid when choosing materials can require waiting for back-ordered supplies to come in. Wanting contractors to bend to your schedule can delay the project even further. Creativity and flexibility are key.

- Establish a budget. It can be easy to spend beyond one's means, especially when issues crop up. Black House Real Estate stresses the importance

of creating a budget before starting a renovation, which may involve working with a local professional to help. Houzz advises preparing for worst-case scenarios by adding anywhere from 1% to 20% to the budget. Commit to sticking to the budget no matter what comes down the pike.

- Assemble a good team. Thoroughly research all contractors who will be involved with the renovation. These include designers, architects, builders and more. Be sure they come highly recommended and research online reviews. A good team removes some stress from the project because you'll know the work is in experienced hands.

- Prepare the space for the remodel. Any work you can do will help save on labor costs and make it easier for the team to get started on the project. Clear out clutter and personal items. Ask if it would be helpful for you to handle some demolition, whether that's pulling up old tile, removing drywall or another task.

- Have an escape hatch at the ready. Home renovations can cause upheaval to daily life and that can mean stress on top of already chaotic schedules. If money and situation allow, plan a getaway during a particularly tough stretch of the project so the noise, mess, and disruptions will not induce headaches. Consider spending a few nights at a hotel or a friend or relative's house to escape the constant grind of the project.

— Metro Editorial Services



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A license doesn't guarantee quality work, but it does increase the chances that your contractor will have the skills to do the job.





PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

AROUND THE HOUSE

PROJECTED TIMELINES FOR POPULAR RENOVATION PROJECTS

Renovations help homeowners customize their homes to align with their needs and wants.

Remodeling may be necessary to replace outdated fixtures and features, address mistakes previous homeowners may have made, or to make a home more functional.

Homeowners often find it beneficial to hire professional contractors when they have work to be done around the house to ensure the job gets done to code and to their satisfaction. Timelines for home remodeling projects vary depending on a number of variables, including the size of a crew as well as the scope of the project.

Once a project commences, the timeline can feel endless.

Here are some estimates of timelines for top remodeling projects to give homeowners an idea of how long their renovation projects may last, courtesy of Renofi, a company that provides a lending platform leveraged by credit unions nationwide to offer loans to consumers.

Kitchen

There are a lot of moving parts to a kitchen renovation, involving the services of electricians, plumbers, structural experts, and even interior design professionals. Not to mention the needs of craftspeople who can make custom cabinetry and countertops. Kitchen

remodels can take anywhere from six to 12 weeks.

Bathroom

The process of a bathroom renovation typically involves demolishing the old bathroom, removing old fixtures and starting from the ground up. As with a kitchen remodel, bathroom jobs require the services of different professionals. That is why homeowners can expect three to 10 weeks for a bathroom, depending on the scope of the project.

Finishing a basement

Finishing a basement can add valuable living space to a home. Establishing a home theater space or man cave may require installing framing, insulation, utilities, drywall, flooring, and any additional needs if the finished basement will have a bathroom or necessitate additional plumbing. A finished basement project can last one to two months. But the good news is that typically the rest of the house is livable while the work is being done, so residents will not be disrupted.

Whole home remodel

Hogan Design & Construction says that a whole house remodeling project can take anywhere from 16 weeks to 24 weeks. More involved projects can take longer.

— Metro Editorial Services

PLANNING

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A LENGTHY RENOVATION PROJECT

Home renovations can increase resale value and outfit spaces to make them more accommodating.

Homeowners interested in remodeling projects understand that such undertakings are often a lengthy process.

But the time spent waiting often is well worth it when the work is done and the finished product looks just as homeowners imagined.

Depending on the scope and scale of a project, home renovations can take anywhere from a day or two for minor cosmetic changes to many months for a major project.

The lender RenoFi says projects like remodeling a kitchen or bathroom have a lot of moving parts, including plumbing and electrical work, structural changes, flooring, and installation of appliances. Due to that complexity, such projects may take six to 12 weeks. A home addition can take months.

Homeowners weary of such lengthy undertakings can implement these strategies to make conditions at home more manageable:

- Get a rough estimate from contractors so that you can budget accordingly. A project will go nowhere without proper funding. Get detailed estimates that include labor and building materials. Then start saving and stash money away for the project so you're not caught off-guard later on.

- Clear out clutter. Remove any extraneous items from the room or rooms that will be remod-

eled. Although it will be an added expense, it is a good idea to rent a storage unit or have a storage pod placed in the driveway or yard for the duration of the project. Move items that will not be needed into the unit. This will get them out of the way and protect them from damage.

- Consider starting in warm weather. Contractors will be going in and out of the home each day, and doors and windows may need to be propped open. Schedule a project during those months when temperatures are more comfortable. If the project involves limited access to the kitchen to cook, utilizing an outdoor grill or kitchen is much easier when the weather is pleasant.

- Stay elsewhere. While some people have no issues living in a residence during a renovation, others may find the work simply too inconvenient or distracting to be around. Time away from the property can help manage stress, and prevent kids, pets and others from getting in the way of work.

- Safeguard sensitive items. Take inventory of items in the home and catalog them for insurance purposes. This way you're covered in the case of damage or theft. Remove documents, like birth certificates, passports, insurance policies, and other private papers, and keep them in a safety deposit box or fireproof safe.

— Metro Editorial Services



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

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

BASEMENT

THE BASICS OF BASEMENT CONVERSION PROJECTS

Space is a sought-after commodity in real estate. Buyers prioritize numerous variables when searching for a new home and square footage is often near the top of their lists.

The real estate market has been highly competitive in recent years and home prices have remained high as a result.

That reality has prompted some homeowners who feel they have outgrown their homes to look for ways to increase the usable space in their existing properties.

Basement conversions are one way to add more space. Homeowners mulling a basement conversion project can learn the basics of the project as they try to determine if such renovations are right for them.

- Basement conversion projects can be costly. Though the final cost of a conversion project can vary widely depending on the condition and accessibility of the existing space, estimates range from around \$45,000 to as much as \$150,000. The home renovation experts at Angi.com note that the average price for excavation is \$37,000. Of course, homeowners who are simply hoping to repurpose an existing basement likely won't need to pay for excavation. Accessibility is another notable variable that can affect the final cost. If the current space is a crawl space, potentially costly structural changes may be necessary to ensure contractors and eventually residents can access the area. Basements that are already easily accessible won't require such expenditures.

- Ventilation is a must. Finished basements must be adequately ventilated so moisture can be controlled. Without sufficient ventilation, the damp conditions common in many basements can foster the growth of mold. The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America notes that inhaled mold spores can trigger allergic reactions in some people, potentially leading to runny nose, postnasal drip, red and watery eyes, and itchy eyes, nose, ears and mouth, among other symptoms. Waterproofing systems and adequate ventilation can prevent mold growth in a basement and these should be integral components of the design.

- Permits are part of the process. Basement conversions are considered major projects and typically require homeowners and contractors to secure permits before any work is done. Permits may be necessary at various stages of the project. Homeowners who ignore laws regarding permits will have trouble selling their homes down



Instead of paying full price for furniture, buy discounted pieces.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

the road, as it can be difficult if not impossible to secure a certificate of occupancy if renovations were made without securing the proper permits. In addition, securing necessary permits for each phase of the project can ensure final approval of the project. If permits are not secured along the way, local officials may insist work be

redone to adhere to local laws, which can make the project even more costly.

- Basement conversions take time. The time a project takes will depend on the condition of the space at the start of the project and various details unique to each conversion. However, various contractors indicate projects take about two to three

months once they begin. That timeline does not include the pre-project process of finding a contractor, soliciting design plans or preparing the rest of the home for such a significant and lengthy undertaking.

— Metro Editorial Services



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

BEDROOM

TIPS TO MAKE GUEST ROOMS MORE WELCOMING

Hosting loved ones is a selfless act that enables families to create lasting memories.

As hosts prepare their homes for short-term guests, they can consider these tips to make guest rooms as welcoming as possible for friends and family:

- Check the bedding and replace, if necessary. It's easy to overlook the comfort of bedding in a guest room, particularly since hosts may never sleep in their own guest rooms. When furnishing a guest room, it's not unheard of to repurpose an existing mattress from an owner's suite or another room and use for guest room bedding. Though that's acceptable, it's necessary to periodically inspect a guest room mattress to make sure it's still comfortable and supportive. If not, replace the mattress. A mattress topper, a new comforter and a new set of soft sheets also can make guest room bedding more comfortable.

- Clear out the clutter. Guest rooms can easily become depositories for old furniture and other items, which can create a cluttered and less than welcoming atmosphere in a space. Give each guest room a thorough once-over before guests arrive, removing pieces that might be creating a claustrophobic vibe. Keep in mind that guests will bring luggage, so a less cluttered space with ample room for their bags can make it easier to settle in.

- Take a cue from hotels. — *Metro Editorial Services*

Hotels ensure guests have ample creature comforts at their fingertips. Hosts can do the same when welcoming loved ones into their homes. Provide ample bed and bath linens, ensure the room has ample lighting so guests can read at bedtime and get dressed in plenty of light in the morning. A foldable luggage rack is another nice touch that can keep guests from having to dig through their suitcases on the floor.

- Add an armchair where possible. A spacious guest room allows hosts to provide some extra creature comforts. If the room allows, place a comfortable armchair and side table in the space so guests can read a book or catch up on the news on a tablet or smartphone. A comfortable, quiet and secluded place to sit provides guests a respite from the hustle and bustle of a home filled with guests.

- Install window coverings, if necessary. A feeling of privacy is another important creature comfort guests will appreciate. Replace existing window treatments if they do not provide adequate privacy or if they do not keep the elements out in the morning. For example, a room that is sun-soaked by early morning each day may make it hard for guests to get sufficient sleep. Some blackout curtains or a new set of blinds allows guests to determine the amount of natural light that will greet them each morning.

A spacious guest room allows hosts to provide some extra creature comforts.



ADOBE STOCK

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SERVICES

Give each guest room a thorough once-over before guests arrive, removing pieces that might be creating a claustrophobic vibe. Keep in mind that guests will bring luggage, so a less cluttered space with ample room for their bags can make it easier to settle in.

LAUNDRY

YOUR WASHING MACHINE CAN CLEAN A LOT MORE THAN CLOTHES

By Jolie Kerr

Special to The Washington Post

Laundry often isn't what comes to mind when we think of spring cleaning, but it should be. Washing machines are deep-cleaning powerhouses that can be used for so much more than just those weekly loads of clothes, sheets and towels.

These deep-cleaning tasks needn't be reserved for springtime — most of these jobs should be performed anywhere from yearly to monthly — but spring is as good a time as any to launder these household objects, many of which get overlooked for cleaning. Before washing anything, check the care tag for guidelines on water temperature, washer cycles and drying recommendations to prevent costly or irreparable damage.

Reusable grocery totes, soft lunch boxes and bags

Reusable bags are great for reducing waste — but they can harbor bacteria that will make you sick if they're not washed regularly. "Keep your reusable bags fresh by tossing them in the wash," says Alicia Sokolowski, the president and co-CEO at AspenClean. "It's an easy way to remove dirt, spills and lingering odors."

Special instructions: Use the hottest water the item can tolerate, and wash more often than you might think — at least once a month.

Pot holders and oven mitts

"These kitchen essentials handle grease and heat daily," Sokolowski says. "Give them a refresh in the washing machine to keep them looking and smelling

clean."

Special instructions: Pretreat set-in stains from grease and food spills before laundering.

Shower curtains and liners

"Toss plastic liners and fabric curtains in the wash to remove soap scum and mildew," Sokolowski says. "Add a couple of towels for extra scrubbing power."

Special instructions: Avoid washing plastic liners in washers with a center agitator, as the fins can tear or shred the material.

Bath mats and bathroom rugs

"Cotton or microfiber mats can usually go in the washer with warm water and a mild detergent," says Rechelle Balanzat, the founder and CEO of Juliette. "Rubber-backed mats should be air-dried or tumble-dried on low to avoid cracking."

Bath mitts, loofahs and poufs

When deep cleaning a shower or tub, don't forget to clean the items that call those places home, like bath mitts, loofahs and poufs. "These can harbor bacteria and mildew if not cleaned regularly," Balanzat says. "Toss them into a lingerie bag and wash on a gentle cycle with mild detergent every few weeks. Air dry completely before reusing."

Winter hats, gloves and scarves

"Machine wash knit and fleece items in cold water with a mild detergent," Balanzat says, "using a mesh bag to prevent stretching. Lay flat to dry. For leather or wool gloves, spot clean or



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Over time, residue — especially from fabric softener — can build up and block openings on the lint screen.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A separate room dedicated to laundry was the most desired feature among prospective home buyers, according to the National Association of Home Builders' 2021 What Home Buyers Really Want report.

dry clean as needed.”

Mattress pads and pillows

“Wash mattress pads every few months using warm water and a gentle cycle to remove dust mites, sweat and allergens. If machine drying, use low heat to prevent shrinkage and keep the padding intact,” Balanzat says. The same goes for pillows, with the exception of memory foam styles, which should be spot-cleaned instead. “Most synthetic and down pillows can be machine washed using a mild detergent on a gentle cycle. Wash two at a time to balance the machine, and dry thor-

oughly with dryer balls to prevent clumping.”

Curtains

Many curtains are washable — check the care tag for cleaning instructions — and, if they can be laundered, Balanzat says to use a cold water delicate cycle, then air dry to prevent shrinking and other damage.

Special instructions: Vacuum or shake curtains before laundering to remove the top layer of dust, hair and other buildup.

Pet beds

Experts recommend wash-

ing pet beds every two to four weeks to keep odors at bay. When cleaning any of your pet's belongings, avoid the use of scented products, including detergents, stain treatments, and odor-eliminating sprays or powders.

Special instructions: Vacuum the bed before laundering to remove hair and dander; use unscented detergent and the hottest water the bed can tolerate.

Pet clothing and accessories

Collars, leashes, sweaters,

booties and other pet clothing and accessories can be machine washed in cold water with unscented detergent. Use a mesh washing bag for leashes and collars to keep them from winding around other items in the load.

Special instructions: Bag small items, and always use unscented laundry products for your pet's belongings.

Hard plastic toys

Yes, small plastic toys like Legos or action figures can be cleaned in the washing machine. It's important to bag these little guys up in a mesh washing bag

and to pad the drum with towels or other bulky items for protection (and soundproofing!).

Stuffed animals

“Most plush toys can handle a gentle cycle,” Sokolowski says. “It's a quick way to clean away dust and allergens while keeping favorites fresh.” Wash stuffed animals with other lightweight or delicate items, and place them in a wash bag for extra protection.

Special instructions: Before washing a stuffed animal, mend any tears or holes to prevent the stuffing from coming out.

INTERIOR

ALL COVERED: HOW TO PICK A WHOLE HOME'S WORTH OF PAINT COLORS

By Kathryn O'Shea-Evans

Special to The Washington Post

Paint color paralysis is real. And the only thing harder than picking the perfect shade is picking a house full of them. Too many jarring hues can leave you feeling like you're walking through a bag of Skittles. But a monochrome medley can be even worse as you shift from room to room: blah.

When it comes to choosing a palette for your entire home, "the main thing is try to be as cohesive as you possibly can be," says Sarah Snouffer, founder and principal of Third Street Architecture in Washington, D.C. "Take a little prep time and sit back, think of the whole house, and then you can tackle it room by room as you go."

Designers have a few words of wisdom for picking a cohesive paint scheme for your home.

Here are their top tips, plus three designer-approved whole home palettes that are yours for the painting:

Pick a starting point

It's wise to start with the room you use the most, says Atlanta-based designer and author Vern Yip.

"For example, a great room that consists of a casual seating area (where the TV is) and a kitchen is often the room that gets used the most in an open space plan home," he said in an email. "Before nailing down the other colors, make sure to get this one right."

Snouffer prefers to start with the largest space.

"Most homes people live in now are not defined room by room; they bleed into everything," she says. Begin with that expansive open plan area, and "everything else will follow suit," she said.

One of Yip's go-to hues is Sherwin-Williams' Illusion.

"I think this is always a decent starting place because it's a fairly warm, mid-tone neutral that plays well with pretty much everything. If it's not your cup of tea, it's a great barometer for going warmer, cooler, deeper, lighter, or more vivid."

To go with it, he recommends several



PHOTO BY STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG

Palladian blue

coordinating paint colors from Sherwin-Williams:

- Mushroom, "a lighter neutral that still manages to add depth and character to a space."

- Prospect, "a wonderful, deep brown that adds so much gravitas to nearly every room it's used in."

- Taiga, "the intersection of dark gray and dark green that's a chameleon in the best possible way."

- Beetroot, for "when you need ... or are ready for ... a room with a punch."

Vary light and dark choices

Architect Seth Ballard, founder of Ballard & Mensua Architecture, was introduced to the colorful architecture and interiors of New Orleans when he was a student at Tulane University. "(There was) lots of color, with no fear of personality."

As a result, he's always pushed the rain-

bow envelope a bit and recommends mixing airy and deeper tones for interest.

"I've always used a little more color in spaces and not been afraid of it," he says, adding that repeating the same trim color throughout the home can tie rooms together.

And don't be afraid of darker colors; they can work beautifully in low-light rooms, Yip says. "In general, I'm not one to combat a dark space with light paint

colors. I find that you get better results when you lean into the lack of light by employing richer, deeper hues."

Consider color undertones

One way to coordinate colors is to ensure their undertones — or underlying hues — go together.

"If you're doing a lighter color, you really, really need to pay attention to the undertones because if you are looking at a swatch or a sample and it has some type of undertone — let's just say yellow for this example — that is going to be more prominent once you get more of that color up" on a wall, Snouffer says.

Also look at the paint sample in various types of light to determine whether the undertones work together, she says, adding that she typically paints samples on the wall in at least 2-by-2-foot sections. "Southern light is going to be your direct light that is going to be much more pure, more blue undertone versus northern light where that's sunlight that is getting bounced off from other things outside of your home and then into your home. ... We leave those samples up for a couple of days and watch them as morning light versus afternoon light, a cloudy day versus a sunny day."

Yip adds that rooms that predominantly receive southern light can benefit from cooler hues, whereas rooms that get cooler northern light may look their best in warmer paint colors.

Snouffer likes to use Benjamin Moore's White Dove in a home's main space, and build her palette from there.

"It's the one that we just have found that has the most neutral undertone, and so it's not too pink, it's not too yellow, it's not too blue," she says. "And so it just always seems to kind of work in spaces." She recently used it in the living room and kitchen of a client's Washington, D.C., townhouse. She surrounded it with several green shades from Benjamin Moore:

- Deep Cushing Green in the dining room

- Sage-y Carolina Gull in the primary bedroom

- Palisades Park, a minty mid-tone, in the powder room

Choose history

Another easy way to build a palette is to use the collections created by paint companies. Ballard particularly likes historic hues — or even close matches to yesteryear's colors (and bonus, the modern versions are lead-free).

"There's an underlying muted nature to the historic color palette that helps tie them together," Ballard said. "I've always had luck (with them)."

He used several blues from Benjamin Moore's historic colors collection for a recent project, unifying the spaces with white trim:

- Palladian Blue (historically used as a color on porch ceilings)
- Wythe Blue
- Van Courtland Blue
- Hale Navy

Place your smallest color punches last

Yip suggests picking colors for lesser-used spaces, such as pantries and powder rooms, last. "Rooms that people spend very little time in are the ones to pick at the end and where you can really take chances if you want to," he said.

And don't forget to look at all the colors in person

Trying sample pots of your paint choices before you invest in gallons is always a wise move, but it's not the only thing you need to do. Ballard recommends looking at your color palette at once, well in advance of starting to paint any of the rooms.

"I've always found that when you start narrowing down your paint colors, you need to put them all together in a larger sample and actually create a deck of cards," he said. "And when it's right, it feels right. And it also might help you kick something off the island because when you see it just doesn't kind of 'go.'"

Spoken like a true mix master.



Cushing green

PHOTO BYCHRISTY KOSNIC PHOTOGRAPHY

AROUND THE HOUSE



Colorblindness affects 1 in 12 males and 1 in 200 females in the United States, though as one very famous viral dress can attest, color is subjective even for those without a diagnosis. Aging eyes see color differently. Language, commerce and culture layer meaning on color.

Adding curves to a room, such as in this couch, can soften sharp angles.

PHOTO COURTESY OF A. MATHOURET — REVELATEUR STUDIO ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY

HOW DESIGNERS MAKE ROOMS THAT WORK FOR COLORBLIND CLIENTS

By Amanda Long

Special to The Washington Post

Quintin Tate knows that as an interior designer, it's his job to see things from the perspective of his client.

That guiding force — to put the vision of the client first — was recently put to the test when, 10 minutes into a consultation for a sunroom, Tate's client described the magenta-based color palette before him as "brown and green."

Tate knew that he and his client were literally not seeing the same thing. The client later confirmed, after a trip to the eye doctor, that he was red-green colorblind.

Tate, a lover of lush interiors and rich hues, had to take color out of the picture, or at least those not singing to his client. The exercise in shifting perspective helped sharpen his design chops, he says, and his

empathy and communication skills.

"When you learn that you have to find a shared vision, despite the challenges of color, it's time for you to really kick your problem-solving skills into play," says Tate, the owner of North Carolina-based Twenty Sevyn Interiors.

Colorblindness affects 1 in 12 males and 1 in 200 females in the United States, though as one very famous viral dress can attest, color is subjective even for those without a diagnosis. Aging eyes see color differently. Language, commerce and culture layer meaning on color. One company labels the paint chip lake blue, another deems it denim. There are as many reasons to look beyond color in home design as there are shades of pink polish at a nail salon.

Colorblindness can be a useful detour to other paths to creative collaboration.

We spoke with five interior designers who shared surprisingly universal wisdom gleaned from working with colorblind clients.

Can't paint a picture? Tell a story

Without the option of color to give his colorblind client's sunroom the warmth he desired, Tate pivoted to the idea of place, one the client associates with warmth: the beach.

He created a clean, coastal sanctuary, anchored by a patterned rug in cream and oceanic blue, a color his red-green colorblind client could see. He found pillows with silhouettes of coral and seaweed and covered the couch with a creamy durable fabric that conveys both yacht-club luxury and seaworthy ruggedness. The effect is a bit nautical and a bit beachy: a coastal combo that exudes warmth. His client

couldn't see the green leaves of the large potted plant Tate selected, but he could appreciate their spiky angles, shadows, sense of movement and nod to nature.

Join the dark side

Black is technically not a color; a black object absorbs all the colors of the visible spectrum and reflects none of them to the eyes. In other words, colorblind clients can see it. And if it's up to Miami-based interior designer Ashleigh Hue (yes, that's her real name), everyone would see it as a versatile go-to.

Hue hasn't found a detail she doesn't love in black: fixtures, bedroom walls, kitchen islands.

"Black is often associated with elegance, sophistication and a sense of mystery. It has a timeless quality that can add a touch of drama and depth," she says. "I can use

it to create sleek and minimalist designs, and bold and edgy ones.”

Toronto-based interior designer Michael London knows that black can read as eerie or too masculine, but he encourages homeowners to not shy away from using it as a focal piece.

He did just that with the free-standing fireplace in a colorblind client's home. He also likes it as a strong supporting character that helps other elements shine, whether it's a black floor topped with a colorful rug or the veins and lines of a marble kitchen island.

“Black can truly make everything around it better,” London says. “You see textures in detail; colors pop; lines are sharpened.”

Come to (all) your senses

Texture is a classic element of design, one that designers lean into to engage their colorblind clients' sense of touch.

When London learned that his luxury-seeking client was colorblind, he immediately shifted to seeing things in monochrome, which allowed him to focus on other elements.

“The real challenge is: How do I make it an experience for that particular client?” London says. “How can I give him distinctions and details he can truly enjoy?”

He chose a combination of hair-on-hide fabric and suede for the walls, paired with silk drapery.

“Playing up the texture just adds more depth to the room,” he says. “We're still working on the project now, and he's loving the process because we're still playing on texture and touch.”

London also considers smell and sound, prescribing scents and soundtracks for all his clients.

In his own office, clients arrive to hear the crackle of a fireplace and his curated office soundtrack. For rooms where you entertain, soundtracks are crucial, London says, as they give a foundational vibe the party (or baby shower, luncheon, etc.) can build upon.

Pick a pattern or two. Or seven

Patterns pack a visual punch equally powerful to color.

“Colorblind clients still feel like they're getting that pop — it's just not a pop of color,” says Christina Kittelstad, a color consultant, home stager, painter and owner of Spiral Design Color Consulting in Lakewood, Colorado. Patterned wallpaper and shapes playing off one another in pillows, furniture and rugs can all give a room depth and energy regardless of hue.

During a recent design for a colorblind client's living space and art gallery, Houston-based interior designer Christopher Charles Evans packed in patterns on the hair-on-hide ottoman focal piece, in tex-



PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL LONDON DESIGN

Interior designer Michael London likes using the color black as a focal piece like he did with this free-standing fireplace in a colorblind client's home.

ture-rich pillows and a “lot of geometrical shapes going on with high contrast in color,” says the owner of Christopher Charles Interiors and IndigoRED, LLC.

In that same client's bedroom, patterns play nicely off each other, with lines and curves zinging from one pillow to the shapely “Space Age meets art deco” shiny light fixtures.

And there's plenty to get your hands on here too: A lush ocean of a blanket is the tactile cherry on top of a three-throw pileup, and Evans concocted a signature

scent of rose and sandalwood for his client's room.

In his colorblind client's bathroom, London constructed a pattern playground with flower petals in a painting harmonizing with the shapes of the room's modern chandelier. (Yes, chandeliers in bathrooms are a thing.) The abstract petals in the painting also vibe with a row of the flowers lined up on a ledge above the tub.

Get into shape

Shapes speak volumes throughout the

home of London's colorblind client and in the designer's own office.

Curvy couches soften more angular features and give a sense of serpentine movement.

“I love how (the couch) creates flow and allows the eye to both move through a space while offering a soft landing,” London says.

Repeating rectangles in the form of door frames add to that sense of rhythm as they lead from the client's bathroom into the vanity and dressing room. Surrounded by textured wallpaper, in varying shades of brown, anchored by a travertine floor, with its own rectangular tiles, the hallway leads to a lit-from-behind mirror.

Put it in neutral

As every Gen Z-er in beige athleisure knows, neutrals are having a sustained moment.

Colorblind clients are sharply attuned to tone, and designers herald neutrals as the best way to capture these slight changes in saturation and depth.

“My colorblind clients tell me they just feel safer with neutrals,” says Kittelstad. “You can't go wrong really. Even if you mess up, it's still probably not going to look bad.”

Neutrals offer a quick solution to the paralysis often associated with home projects of any scale, whether you can see color or not.

“Sometimes you don't want to take that risk, or maybe there's a lot of that going on in your life,” Kittelstad says. “Neutral choices can keep it simple. There's no denying that.”

Make it work

If your party room doesn't accommodate more than two people, your office has no outlets and that granite island has left a permanent bruise on your thigh, then all the bold patterns and interesting textures can't do a thing to make your design work for you.

Colorblind clients raise the bar on functionality, designers say, and underscore the ethos of all good design.

“The functionality of a space is the underpinning of effective and value-added interior design,” Evans says. “A space that has great function adds value, ease and order to the client's environment and daily living.”

Common mistakes in function that Evans sees are the absence of linen closets in new construction, lack of storage, not using performance fabrics for high-use upholstered furniture, inadequate door and cabinetry swing directions, and sacrificing function for cost.

“No deal is good if you have to go out and buy a better version of it when it fails to perform,” Evans says.

GARAGE

WHAT TO KNOW WHEN THINKING OF DOING A GARAGE REMODEL

Homeowners tend to want to maximize all of the space they have in their homes. For some, this may involve turning a garage from a utilitarian space into one that serves multiple purposes.

According to The Mortgage Reports, a home-buying and improvement resource, garage renovations can increase the value of a home and add living space. Garage remodels can create additional storage space, provide an area for a home gym or even create room for a home office.

Prior to beginning a garage remodel, homeowners may have some common questions about the process.

How much does the renovation cost?

Several factors will ultimately determine the final price of a garage remodel, but HomeAdvisor says the national average for a garage remodel falls between \$6,000 and \$26,000. Most homeowners come in at around \$15,000 for a total garage conversion.

Will I recoup the investment?

A garage conversion adds value to a home if it creates new and usable living space. The firm Cottage, which pulled together a team of builders, architects and technologists, advises the average garage conversion provides an 80% return on investment. That ROI varies depending on location.

How can I upgrade the flooring?

Garages traditionally feature concrete floors. Although durable, concrete floors can feel damp, hard and cold underfoot. Both vinyl plank and epoxy flooring options can elevate the design and functionality of the garage.

Can I have the best of both worlds?

Sometimes a garage needs to serve many purposes. Lofting the garage means a homeowner can still park cars or utilize the lower space as a living area, all the while items are stored overhead. Some flip this design scenario and have the loft area as a bedroom or finished living space, while the lower portion remains a traditional garage area. Another thought is to finish only a portion of the garage. This works well for two- or three-car garages where there will be room to park a car and the remainder will serve another purpose.

What are other ways to improve the garage?

Installing more windows or improving on the lighting in the garage can be important. The garage improvement experts at Danley's say window installation enables people to circulate air in the garage without having to open the garage door. Improving the lighting means the garage can still be enjoyed or utilized after dark. Spread out lighting in the garage, and use a combination of overhead and task lighting just as one would in the home itself.

How do I deter bugs or other pests from entering?

Insects often want to hunker down in garages, and they may find it easy to get inside a garage. Keeping the garage clean and organized is the best way to deter pests and to spot infestations before they become problematic, indicates Mosquito Joe pest control company. Reducing water and humidity in the space, weatherproofing at the base of the garage door and other entry spots and utilizing insect repellents to make the garage less hospitable also can decrease the risk of insect infestation.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES



Almost one-third of us don't park our car in the garage, no matter how large, according to Consumer Reports.

AROUND THE HOUSE

COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT CARPETING

No two homeowners are the same and that's perhaps most evident in the design decisions individuals make when decorating their homes.

Flooring is among the first things a person notices when entering a home and the array of options consumers have when choosing flooring materials underscores how unique each homeowner is.

Carpeting is a popular flooring option.

Many homeowners prefer carpeting because they feel it helps to create a cozy, welcoming vibe in a home. Consumers considering carpet for their homes may have some common questions.

Is carpeting expensive?

Home renovations are expensive and the cost of a project is often the first question homeowners have. The cost of carpeting varies widely and is contingent on an array of variables unique to each home and homeowner, including square footage, materials chosen by the homeowner and the cost of labor associated with installation, which can vary significantly between locations. According to the online renovation

resource HomeAdvisor, the average cost to install or replace carpet is between \$782 and \$2,812. That wide range illustrates how much the cost of the project will be affected by variables unique to each project. However, even homeowners who come in around or above the high end of that estimate may find carpet installation is among the more affordable ways to give the interior of a home an entirely new look and feel.

How different are carpeting materials?

Carpeting materials differ in their look, feel and function. The home renovation experts at Angi.com note that some carpet fibers are better suited to areas in a home that attract a lot of foot traffic, while others make for better options in areas with less use, such as a bedroom or home office. For example, polyester has a luxurious, soft feel, making it a strong option for bedroom floors. Nylon carpet fiber is resistant to stains and damage and maintains its height under heavy weight, making this a good option in heavily

trafficked rooms. Homeowners can discuss each carpeting material with their flooring retailer to determine which suits their budget and which is best in each room of their homes.

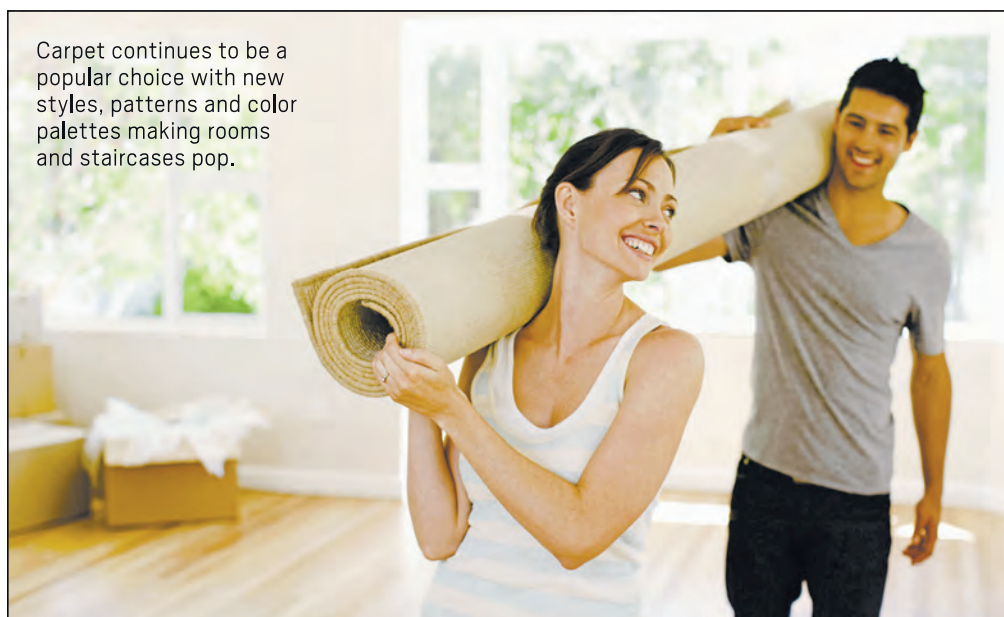
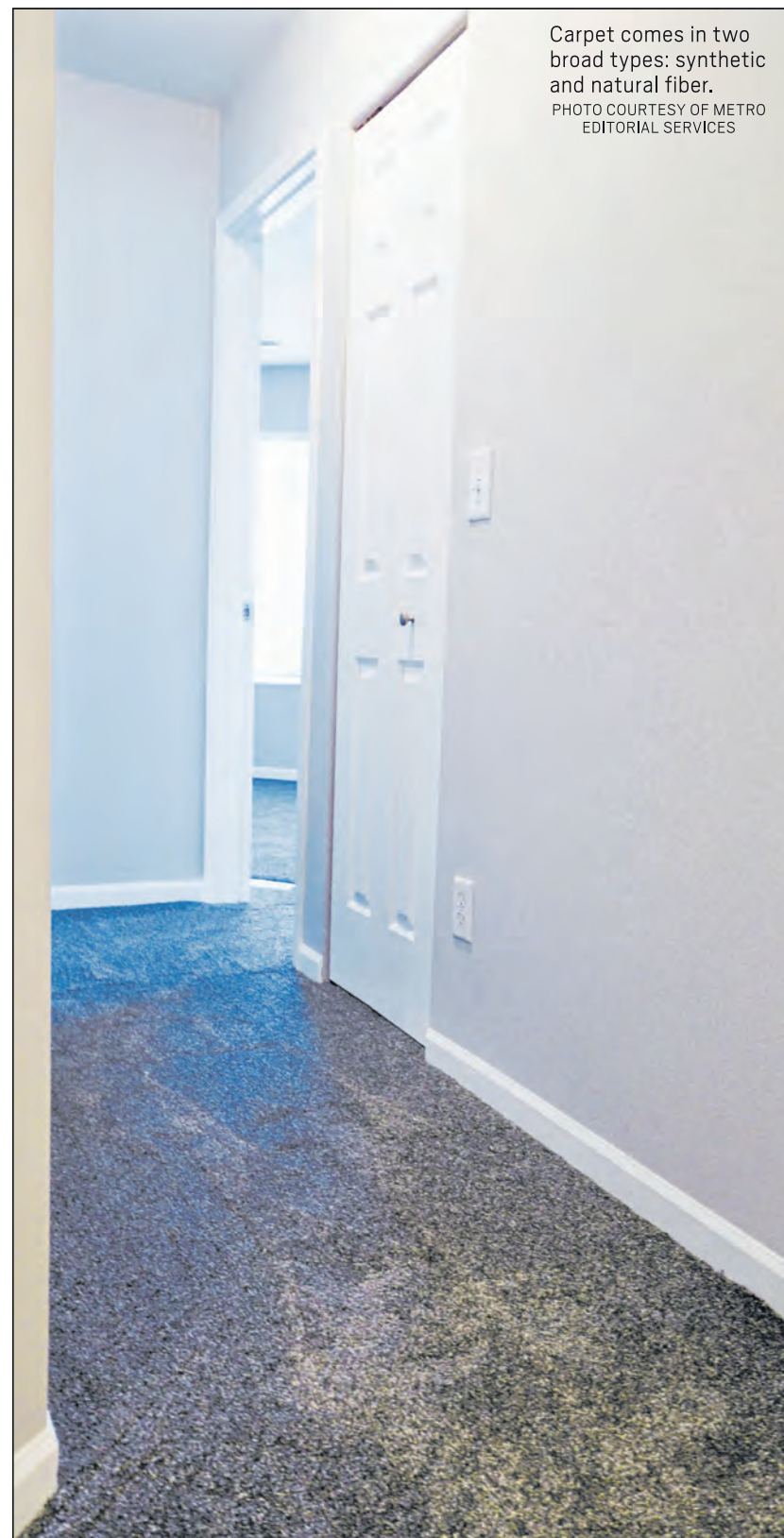
Is carpet padding a must?

Carpet padding is one of the costs associated with carpeting. When shopping for carpeting for the first time, homeowners may notice carpet padding costs on their estimate and wonder what it is and if it's truly necessary. Carpet padding is necessary, as Flooring101.com notes that it keeps the underside of the carpet from wearing against the subfloor while absorbing the impact of foot traffic and furniture. That absorption helps to reduce stress on the carpet and thus extend its life expectancy. Carpet padding also can have an insulating effect and help to reduce sound in a room. So while carpet padding might be a costly expense on an itemized estimate, it's well worth the investment.

— Metro Editorial Services

Carpet comes in two broad types: synthetic and natural fiber.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES



Carpet continues to be a popular choice with new styles, patterns and color palettes making rooms and staircases pop.

AROUND THE HOUSE

HOW TO RECOGNIZE WHEN IT'S TIME TO REPLACE YOUR WINDOWS



PHOTO COURTESY OF STATEPOINT MEDIA

For kitchens and breakfast nooks, bathrooms and dens, consider vinyl garden windows, which invite more light into your space and include shelves ideal for housing indoor plants, such as fragrant herbs.

Windows are a major component of a home.

Window installation professionals will tell homeowners that the average lifespan of residential windows is between 15 and 30 years.

Most well-maintained products can last 20 years, so homeowners who have windows approaching that age may want to schedule a window assessment and possible replacement.

Replacing windows is a job that requires advanced skill and is not a do-it-yourself project.

There are many qualified professional window installation companies that will work with homeowners to measure, order and install windows that will fit with the style of a home and local weather, all while providing features the homeowner desires.

For those wondering when to replace windows, Pella and Renewal by Andersen, two of the premiere window manufacturers, offer these guidelines:

- Difficulty opening and closing windows. A window that does not operate as it should can aggravate homeowners. If windows are sticking shut or cannot be securely closed, it's probably time for something new.

- There's apparent window damage. Accidents happen, and if a rock is kicked up from a lawnmower and cracks a window or if spring baseball practice has gone awry

with an errant throw, windows may require replacement.

- Drafts in the window are common. If heating and cooling systems are working overtime, drafty, poorly insulated windows could be to blame. Various agencies can perform energy efficiency tests in a home. Windows that are determined to be the weak spots should be replaced.

- Dated windows are present in the home. Older windows may pose safety hazards, especially those in older homes. A larger window may be needed to comply with fire safety codes allowing for window egress. Dated windows also may simply look "old" and compromise the aesthetics of a home.

- Outdoor noises are noticed quite readily. Newer windows can help reduce noise transmission. So those leaf blowers, airplanes, barking dogs, and kids playing basketball up the street won't disturb homeowners as they try to enjoy some peace and quiet indoors.

- Fading indoors is noted. Windows that do not feature low-emissivity (Low-E) glass coatings will not block UV rays. Those rays can cause fading to wood floors and furniture or pretty much anything the sunlight touches. Replacing existing windows with Low-E coating alternatives can safeguard belongings and improve window efficiency.

— Metro Editorial Services



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

There are plenty of reasons to invest in new windows.

FULL CIRCLE

MAKING ROOM: HOW SPRING CLEANING ALSO DECLUTTERS EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

By Kim Sheffield-Chang
Stacker

As winter's last shadows recede and the first hints of spring emerge, a time-honored tradition begins to take shape across American homes: spring cleaning. While it may involve scrubbing corners, organizing closets, and clearing the accumulation of winter's dust and clutter from your home, Blueprint, a therapist-enablement technology platform, explains how research has revealed that your physical environment is deeply connected to your mental state, and that this annual ritual is doing more than just making your home sparkle. What if spring cleaning is actually a powerful tool for emotional renewal, psychological reset, and creating space for personal growth?

The psychology of decluttering

A clean space isn't just about aesthetics — it's about creating mental clarity. Modern psychological research reveals a connection between our physical environment and mental well-being. A comprehensive study by the National Stress Institute found that 87% of Americans experience reduced stress levels in organized living spaces.

This isn't mere coincidence — it's a deeply ingrained psychological response. To better understand the underlying science, Vivian Chung Easton, a mental health clinician at Blueprint, explains that cleaning triggers a cascade of positive neurochemical reactions. The phenomenon behind this is fascinating. Dopamine — the brain's feel-good neurotransmitter — increases by 47% during and after cleaning activities. It's like a natural mood boost, triggered by the simple act of putting things in order. Additionally, levels of cortisol, a hor-

mone associated with stress, are reduced during and after cleaning, and organized spaces are found to correlate with a 55% reduction in anxiety symptoms. The science is clear: Tidying up can physically make you feel better.

Letting go: more than just cleaning

Research demonstrates that decluttering is more than a physical act — it's a form of emotional processing. By methodically evaluating and releasing physical items, individuals engage in a form of psychological catharsis.

For instance, you tend to keep things that have sentimental value. So while that item may not have a role in your life anymore, it evokes an emotion that you want to remember, so you treasure those items. Let's talk about what that means: Think about that shoebox full of old mementos or a sweatshirt from a relationship long ended. Keeping it might mean holding onto past pain. Letting it go could symbolize your readiness to move forward. Every item you own carries a story, an emotional weight. That stack of unread books, the kitchen gadget purchased during an optimistic New Year's resolution, baby clothes — each represents more than its physical form. They are repositories of memories, expectations, and sometimes, unresolved emotions.

But this doesn't mean you should just toss things out. It's not about erasing memories, but about choosing which ones continue to shape your present. When you systematically declutter, you're doing more than organizing: You're processing memories, releasing attachments, and

creating psychological and emotional space for growth. The results of groundbreaking longitudinal research by Christina Leclerc and Elizabeth Kensinger offers a strategic approach. Their studies show a 76% success rate in emotional processing through systematic item evaluation, with participants reporting increased psychological flexibility.

The key is intentionality — asking yourself not just “do I need

Every item you own carries a story, an emotional weight. That stack of unread books, the kitchen gadget purchased during an optimistic New Year's resolution, baby clothes — each represents more than its physical form

this?” but “what emotional weight does this carry?”

The effects of considering each item goes beyond emotional processing: 62% of individuals reported significant emotional relief after deliberately discarding items with complex emotional associations. In short, this isn't about ruthless elimination but about mindful selection. Choosing which memories and attachments continue to serve your present self can better make space for future growth.

Practical strategies for emotional (and actual) decluttering

Transforming spring cleaning from a mundane chore into a meaningful psychological intervention requires intentionality. Below, Easton shares some evidence-based strategies.

- **Systematic evaluation:** When looking for a place to start decluttering, it can feel overwhelming to look at a pile of your things and instantly know what stays and

what goes. It's helpful to break down the task of decluttering into smaller, more manageable components — the first of which is establishing categories to place your items. Create these categories — keep, maybe, donate, discard — with emotional awareness so you can begin sorting through your things. Beyond categories, you don't have to evaluate all your items at once, you can take things step-by-step and perhaps take on a closet one day, and a junk drawer the next.

- **Asking yourself the right questions:** Approach each item as a conscious choice. Ask yourself “does this support my current and future self?” rather than “do I need this?” If you can easily think of the ways that an item supports you, then it's a keep. However, if you're struggling with that, it can go in the “maybe” category, which you can revisit with the same questions later. When evaluating things for donation, ask yourself whether the item may bring greater value to someone else's life than your own. When donating, you're giving the item another chance at helping those around us.

- **Mindful processing:** Allow yourself to feel the emotions that surface. Acknowledge memories without becoming trapped by them. Recognize that letting go isn't erasure but evolution. If you truly want to declutter, one thing you can do is keep the items that you consider sentimental, and revisit them in a few months to see if they still hold that value. Chances are that the things that had sentimental value at the time will have faded. However, the items that have true, deep meaning will continue to have value, and you should continue to keep them.

- **Create a ritual for closure:** As you sort and evaluate your items, there may be some things that you want to let go of, but are unsure how. It can be helpful to take a moment to appreciate and mourn the loss of an item. For example, you can spend some time recalling the fond memories you associate with the item, and maybe take a picture of it with your new memories. Closure can be an important part of letting things go, so take your time.

As we inch toward spring, it can be helpful to see your cleaning as more than a seasonal chore. It can be an opportunity for emotional maintenance, a chance to create external order that reflects — and can help create — internal peace. The most encouraging finding? The emotional benefits of a regular ritual of cleaning and organizing aren't fleeting. Longitudinal studies tracking participants six months post-decluttering revealed sustained psychological improvements for 53% of individuals. What's more, orderly environments correlated with a 39% increase in overall life satisfaction.

Spring cleaning isn't just about tidiness: It's real, lasting change sparked by something as simple as reorganizing your space. It's an opportunity for emotional maintenance, a ritualistic process of letting go and making space to support your internal growth, resilience, and emotional well-being.

So as you're sorting through any clutter this spring, take time to consider each item you touch. Honor the memories, but also recognize your capacity for change. Your physical space is a reflection of your inner world — and by consciously curating that space, you're actively participating in your own psychological renewal. The boxes are waiting. The memories are ready to be processed. Your emotional reset button is within reach.

LIVING ROOM



TIPS TO MAKE A LIVING ROOM A MORE COMFORTABLE, WELCOMING SPACE

A kitchen is widely recognized as the most popular room in a home.

Though it might be true that the hustle and bustle of home life runs through the kitchen, many a memory is made in the living room, as well.

Living rooms tend to be go-to spaces for family movie nights, game watches with fellow fans and places to gather during holiday celebrations.

That's a lot of quality time spent in the living room, and those moments can be more enjoyable if the space is as comfortable as possible.

With that in mind, people can consider various ways to make living rooms more

comfortable:

- Prioritize comfort over aesthetics. In an era of Instagram, it's easy to fall head over heels with images when designing a living room. Aesthetic appeal certainly has its place in a living room, but it's important to remember how much living will be done in these rooms when designing them. Comfortable couches and furnishings like ottomans can make it easier to relax in the living room whether you're watching a movie, cheering on your favorite team or reading a book.

- Ensure there's ample seating. It can be hard to feel comfortable in cramped quarters whether you're welcoming friends and

family into your home or simply lounging around on Sunday mornings. If comfort is your top priority, arrange the room so there's ample seating throughout and people don't feel like they're sitting on top of one another when spending time in the room.

- Consider neutral paint colors. Furnishings are not the only things that can affect how comfortable people feel in a living room. The home improvement experts at The Spruce note that neutral paint colors with warm undertones help to establish a cozy feel in a living room. Various shades of white, beige, tan or even gray can help to establish a warm, comfortable

vibe in a living room.

- Incorporate the outdoors into the room. The great outdoors can have a calming effect on anyone, so it makes sense that incorporating the outdoors into a living room can make the space feel more comfortable. Furnish the room with plants and look for items with earth-toned furnishings to create a calm and comfortable vibe in the space. In addition, new windows that allow for more natural light and offer views into a yard can help lift spirits and make the room feel more comfortable.

— Metro Editorial Services