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In addition, the team helped create a special room for a young local girl through the Make-A-Wish Foundation and participated in "A Night In a Box," which required sleeping outside to raise money to combat homelessness. With dedication to giving back exemplified by our leadership, company-wide belief in philanthropy has become our norm.

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What to know about installing a pool at home

Summer is a season of relaxation when school is not in session, vacation season is in full swing and people are getting outside and soaking up the summer sun. It's hard to imagine how that can get any better. But it can for people thinking of installing a pool in their backyard.

Pools definitely have a wow factor that's hard to replicate. Homeowners considering pool installation can take note of these factors as they try to decide if a pool is right for them.

COST

The cost to install a pool depends on a host of factors, including which type of pool homeowners are considering and where they live.

According to the online home improvement resource Angi (formerly Angie's list), the average cost to install an above ground pool in the United States in 2022 was \$3,322, while the average inground pool installation in the same year was \$55,000. That's quite a disparity in price, and homeowners should know that the average cost of each project is higher in certain regions and under certain circumstances.

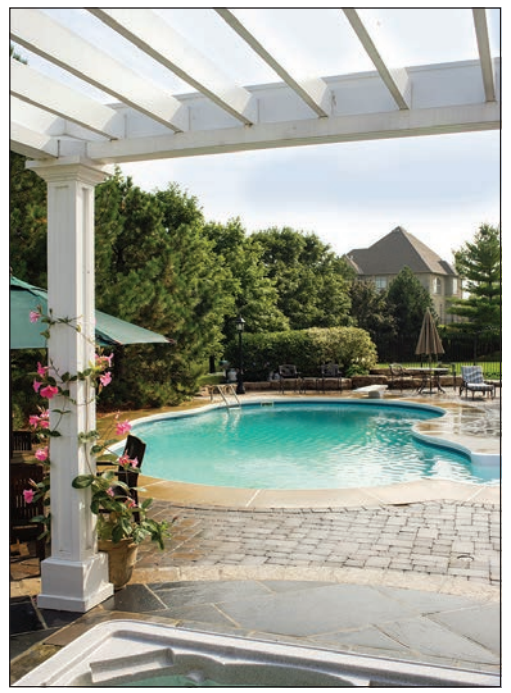
Potential ancillary costs, such as excavation and plumbing relocation, will add to the final cost of the project. The erection of fencing around the pool if no fencing currently surrounds the area where the pool will be located also will add to the final cost.

POOL TYPE

As noted, above ground pools, on average, require a considerably smaller financial investment than inground pools. This is an important consideration, but which option may ultimately prove the better investment is worth researching. Homeowners can speak with a local real estate professional to determine if an inground pool or above ground might yield a significantly higher return at resale. If an inground pool is likely to increase property value by a substantial amount, it could be well worth the extra upfront costs.

MAINTENANCE

Pools are undeniably fun, but they still require maintenance. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens note that vinyl liners in pools last approximately six to 10 years, while painted concrete



may require a fresh coat of paint every five years.

Plaster finishes may last as long as 15 years, while cement-coated products can last a lifetime. Pools also need periodic cleaning, and chemicals to keep the pool operating safely and cleanly will require an additional, if somewhat minimal, financial investment.

Homeowners investing in a new pool should be aware of the maintenance required to keep the pool clean and be willing to do that maintenance. And though homeowners typically can open and close pools on their own, it's also possible to hire someone to do it for a relatively small fee each season.

LOCATION

A survey of the land in a yard can reveal how smoothly a pool installation may or may not go. Though it's possible to install a pool in just about any yard, some spaces might require greater preparation and pre-installation effort than others. Sloped backyards, for example, may require the services of a landscape architect to prepare the space, which can extend the time it takes to complete the project and add the overall cost.

These are just some of the factors that merit consideration when mulling a pool installation. A homeowners' best resource might be a local pool company who can visit a home, provide an estimate and point out any challenges that may arise during the install.

(METRO CREATIVE)

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EDITOR IN CHIEF: Heather Ruenz
SPECIAL SECTIONS: Melanie Bradley
CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Heidi Schulz
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR: Vicki Vanderwerff
PAGE DESIGNER: Jen DeGroot

Renovations that help sell homes

The adage “there’s a lid for every pot” suggests that, even in relation to the real estate market, there’s bound to be a buyer for every home on the market.

Price is a significant variable in the minds of potential buyers, but there are additional factors that can affect the impression people get of a given home.

Certain home features can tip the scales in favor of sellers. In fact, various renovations can help sell homes more readily. And these renovations need not cost a fortune. Putting a home on the market can be stressful, but these renovations may help it sell fast.

- **A fresh coat of paint:** Although painting is relatively inexpensive and a job that some do-it-yourselfers can tackle, it’s not a task relished by many. Painting is messy, it takes time, and requires moving furniture.

In fact, prepping a room for painting often is the toughest component of any painting job. But fresh coats of paint can create a strong first impression. Choose a neutral color and get painting. Jennie Norris, chairwoman for the International Association of Home Staging Professionals, says gray is a “safe” color that has been trending in recent years.

- **Minor bathroom remodel:** Remove dated wall coverings, replace fixtures, consider re-glazing or replacing an old tub, and swap old shower doors for fast fixes in a bathroom.

If there’s more room in the budget, replacing a tub, tile surround, floor, toilet, sink, vanity, and fixtures can cost roughly \$10,500, says HGTV. You’ll recoup an average of \$10,700 at resale, making a minor bathroom remodel a potentially worthy investment.

- **Redone kitchen:** The kitchen tends to be the hub of a home. This room gets the most usage and attention of any space, and it’s a great place to focus your remodeling attention.

The National Association of the Remodeling Industry estimates that homeowners can recover up to 52 percent of the cost of a kitchen upgrade upon selling a home.

Buyers want a functional and updated kitchen. Trending features include drawer-style microwaves and dishwashers, commercial ranges, hidden outlets, and even wine refrigerators.

- **Updated heating and cooling system:** Better Homes and Gardens reports that homeowners may be able to recoup 85 percent of the cost of new HVAC systems when they sell their homes.

Heating, cooling and ventilation components are vital to maintain. You don’t want buyers to be taken aback by an older system, and many millennial buyers are not willing to overlook old mechanical systems.

- **Fresh landscaping:** A home’s exterior is the first thing buyers will see. If they pull up to a home with eye-catching landscaping and outdoor areas that are attractive yet functional, they’re more likely to be intrigued.

Often buyers will equate a home that features an impressive exterior with upkeep inside as well. The American Nursery Landscape Association says the average homeowner may spend \$3,500 for landscaping.

Improving a home’s chances to sell quickly and at a higher price often comes down to making smart improvements that catch the eyes of buyers.



The basics of flipping homes

In recent years, home sellers have experienced record profits as the value of real estate has risen dramatically. Bankrate indicates the median home price across the United States is around \$486,000.

According to WOWA, a personal finance resource in Canada, the national average price of a home in Canada was \$657,145 CAD in December 2023.

Flipping homes gained popularity prior to the spike in real estate prices, but that increase has led some novices to consider flipping more closely. Though it’s true the chances at turning a large profit are substantial in a market where high prices are the norm, potential flippers may benefit from a rundown of the practice before they decide if it’s something they want to do.

WHAT IS FLIPPING?

Flipping works when an investor purchases a property with the intention of selling the home (or business) for profit without actually using it. The basic premise of flipping is to find a property at a low price and sell it at a much higher price, typically after renovating the home. Investopedia says it is important to complete this transaction as quickly as possible to reap the greatest return on investment.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE NECESSARY INVESTMENT OF TIME AND MONEY

Many new flippers overestimate their skills and knowledge and lose money in the process. Common mistakes include thinking that a project will cost less or the home will be turned around quickly. It can take months to find the right property, and then there will be time needed to renovate. Costs involved include the initial sale, renovations, holding costs, and capital gains tax when the sale goes through. All of these can eat into profits.



LIMITED INVENTORY MAKES THINGS TOUGHER

It can be challenging to find a good deal as everyone seemingly wants to be in real estate these days. With fierce competition in a low-inventory market, flipping can be like finding a needle in a haystack.

KNOW THE TAX BENEFITS VS. TAX RISKS

According to Tresa Todd, founder of the Women’s Real Estate Investors Network, flipping may be less tax-efficient in the United States than getting into investment properties. Flippers will be paying short-term capital gains instead of long-term capital gains. According to NerdWallet, capital gains taxes are paid when one sells an asset for profit. The rate at which capital gains is taxed is based on whether you hold an asset for less than

a year or longer than a year. Long-term capital gains tax rates are generally lower than short-term capital gains tax rates.

ABIDE BY THE “GOLDEN RULE”

Most home flippers follow the 70 percent rule. This says one should pay no more than 70 percent of what the house’s estimated ARV (after-repair value) will be, minus the cost of the repairs necessary to renovate the home, says Rocket Mortgage. The ARV is calculated by adding the current property value plus the added value of any renovations. The formula boils down to: $ARV \times .70 - \text{Estimated repair costs} = \text{Maximum buying price}$.

Flipping may seem like a good idea, but prospective flippers understand the process, including the financial commitments, prior to purchasing a home.

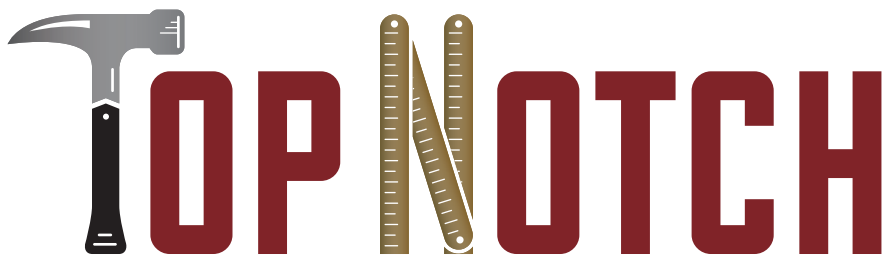


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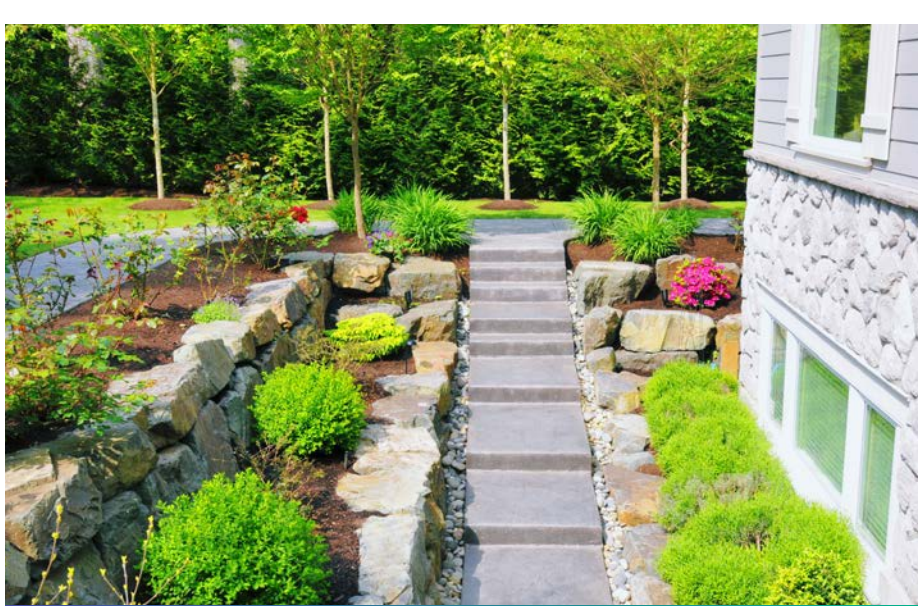
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Features to consider for a **relaxation-themed** bathroom remodel

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 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 ensure 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 natural light to enter the room, making this an option that provides the best of both worlds.

These features and more can help homeowners transform their bathrooms into luxurious, relaxing respites from the outside world.

(METRO CREATIVE)

A LOOK AT THREE POPULAR **FLOORING MATERIALS**



Even though it's underfoot, flooring can set the tone for how a room or even an entire home is viewed. Perhaps that's one reason why flooring generates such strong opinions when homeowners look to refurbish or replace their floors.

Homeowners now have more choices than ever when considering new flooring for their homes. The following rundown of three popular flooring options can help homeowners as they try to decide which material best suits their homes.

HARDWOOD FLOORS

Hardwood floors might once have been a relatively straightforward option, but homeowners may now choose between solid wood flooring and engineered wood flooring.

According to The Home Depot, engineered wood flooring provides the look of solid wood flooring without the high maintenance of such floors. Engineered wood is manmade and created with the use of wood strands, particles, fibers or veneers of wood that are forged together with adhesives.

Each engineered wood flooring plank is composed of several layers of plywood or fiberboard with a solid wood veneer on top, which is how it can provide the look of solid wood flooring. Solid wood flooring planks are made from a single piece of hardwood.

Each type of flooring has its pros and cons, and homeowners who prefer hardwood floors are urged to speak with a flooring professional about the features that make these options unique from one another.

LAMINATE FLOORS

Laminate flooring is another engineered flooring product. But unlike engineered wood flooring, laminate flooring does not utilize real wood and many people can recognize that the moment they step on a laminate floor.

Flooring is such a vital and heavily trafficked component of a home that it's typically best to leave installation to a qualified professional. However, homeowners who prefer the DIY route should know laminate flooring is among the easiest types of flooring for DIYers to install.

VINYL FLOORING

The experts at Good Housekeeping report that vinyl flooring is the fastest-growing category of flooring. The Home Depot notes that vinyl flooring is made from plastic and usually consists of acrylic, PVC and similar polymers. Luxury vinyl tile is thick and durable, and it's often noted for its likeness to solid wood.

Vinyl tile also is considered a versatile flooring option, as The Home Depot notes it can be purchased in planks, sheets or tiles.

The Home Depot advises homeowners to consider the thickness range when mulling their vinyl flooring options. Thickness ranges between four and 40 millimeters, and a thicker layer is more resistant to water, scratches and stains.

Homeowners will be confronted with a variety of options when considering a flooring project for their homes. The right option for a given home may come down to a host of factors, including cost, look and durability.

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Traditional home hallmarks

A home can say a lot about its inhabitants. Perhaps that's one reason why renters and homeowners alike spend so much time and expend so much effort on the various design components of their homes.

Home styles are as diverse as the people who live in the homes. Each design style has its proponents, but traditional style homes are among the most enduring designs. The popularity of traditional style homes has endured for centuries. And though homes built in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries might be vastly different from those constructed in the 1600s and 1700s, they still include characteristics of homes one might have found back in colonial times. But it's also important to note that the notion of "traditional" has changed, and some may now see homes built more than 50 years ago as traditional. That's an important distinction to keep in mind when working with contractors and interior designers, as homeowners who prefer traditional should not hesitate to share how they define that style.

As individuals shop around for new homes or seek inspiration before redesigning their existing spaces, they can consider these hallmarks of traditional-style homes.

• COLOR

According to the home renovation experts at HGTV, traditional-style homes are not typically associated with the muted color palettes common to more modern design schemes. Traditional styles utilize color throughout the home, and each

color of the rainbow can be utilized if individuals so desire. Though neutral colors are found in traditional-style homes, Architectural Digest notes they are typically accompanied with pops of bold colors in jewel tones.

• CLASSIC DECOR

It might be an oversimplification to suggest modern and traditional are at opposite ends of the design spectrum, but traditional-style homes lean on classical decor like chandeliers and bookcases, each of which is unlikely to be found in a modern home.

• ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS

Certain architectural details also are commonly found in traditional-style homes. Wainscoting and crown molding, which harken many back to the style's centuries-old roots, are some hallmarks of the traditional style.

• DEFINED SPACES

Open concept floor plans have become very popular in recent years, but traditional-style homes do not feature open floor plans. Living rooms and dining rooms (which are used exclusively as dining rooms) are defined spaces in traditional-style homes, which also tend to have all bedrooms on the second floor or higher.

The traditional design style has endured for centuries. It's a testament to the appeal of a style that will likely always have a place to call home.

(METRO CREATIVE)

Organizational tips for bathrooms and laundry spaces

No two homes are exactly alike. While homes typically feature certain common amenities, even in planned communities homeowners do their best to set their homes apart from others in the development.

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, as well as laundry areas. Despite their utilitarian nature, bathrooms and laundry rooms can often benefit from better organization. Here are some ways to maximize these spaces.



BATHROOM

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 as well as 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 those open shelves 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.



LAUNDRY

Laundry rooms can be very organized or a catch-all space for objects that simply do not fit in other rooms in the home. Perfecting laundry room organization can take some effort.

- **Folding station:** A laundry room is more useful with a folding station. It can be a separate counter over cabinetry, or innovative homeowners build a counter over front-loading washing machines and dryers.

- **Utilize wall space:** Use hooks and shelving to get items off the floor or counters.

Use them to hold brooms, mops, ironing boards, detergent, and much more.

- **Invest in a pedestal storage drawer:** Laundry pedestal storage drawers can be used to keep dryer sheets, laundry pods and additional supplies out of view.

- **Use space-saving cabinetry:** Pull out drawers and cabinets can hold hampers, ironing boards, and other frequently used items without cluttering up the room.

Organizing bathrooms and wash rooms can give these spaces a cleaner, more impressive look.

(METRO CREATIVE)

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considerations when deciding to go solar

By Hilary Fiene
 STATELINE SOLAR, CHIEF OFFICE MANAGER

Have you noticed more and more solar panel systems, or photovoltaic (PV) systems, in your neighborhood or community? A rapidly growing number of families and businesses are making the switch to renewable energy due to the variety of federal and state incentives available, making for a quick and valuable return on investment. As a local solar company, our team at Stateline Solar offers education and assistance when making decisions about your energy expenses, choosing a solar company to partner with and having peace of mind when making your decision to go solar.

REPUTATION

In a fast-growing industry like solar energy, it's important to know the reputation of the company you're dealing with. Out-of-state or new solar companies might be showing up in the marketplace, but that doesn't mean they will necessarily offer the best service or be around long enough to support and service their product for years to come.

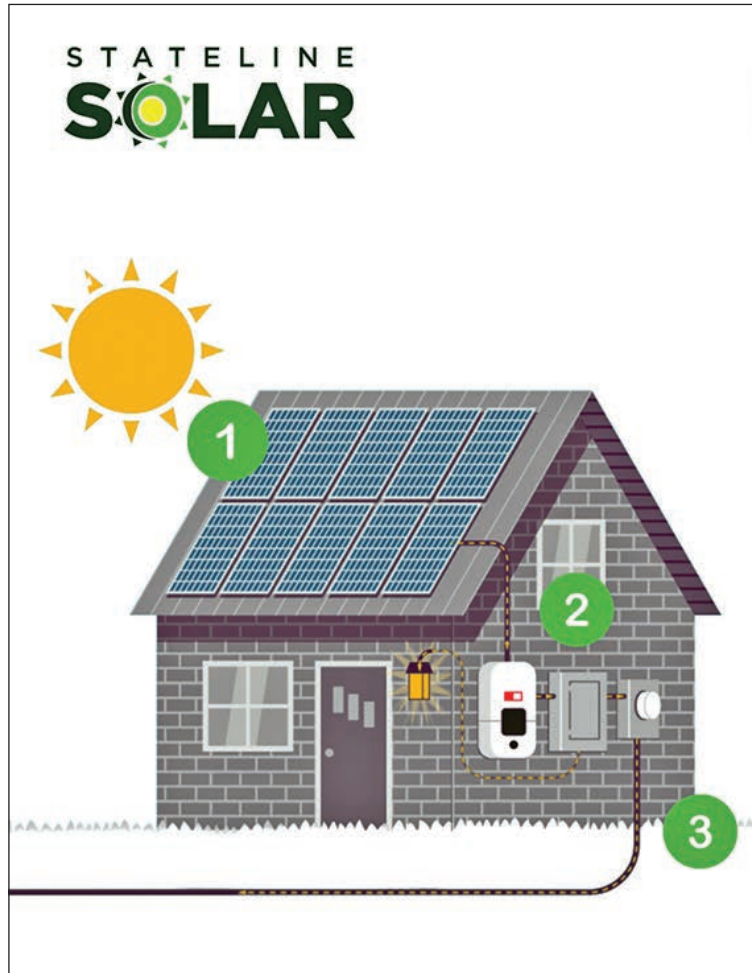
Selecting the right solar company to work with is an important decision. Solar equipment is built and warranted to last 25-years on average, so going solar is a long-term commitment. Look for stability in your solar installer. You'll want to conduct personal research for your future energy partner. Find a company that has developed a great reputation with an extensive track record of satisfied customers. If possible, request the solar company provide you with contact information for customers who have already been serviced with a solar PV system similar to the one you plan to have installed. Hearing directly from trusted customers of the company is the best way to see how that solar company interacts and services their customers.

SYSTEM OPTIONS

When deciding to go solar, you will want to take the variety of technology and components into mind when making your decision. Your solar PV system can be tied to the existing electrical grid (also known as grid-tied) or tied to a battery system (off grid). Be aware, the equipment for these two types of systems differs and will also be reflected in the price of the solar PV system and the equipment associated.

Some solar PV systems generate power more efficiently than others, depending on their design of the system, the location of where the system is placed, and the type of materials used to make up the system. Be sure to ask questions such as if the solar PV system has power optimizers or remote monitoring capability to ensure the system is producing energy to its full potential. These added solar components might be what sets the prices apart when comparing bids, but the overall return on investment of the system will be met sooner when the solar PV system is generating more efficiently to offset your power bill costs.

When considering a solar company, ask them about the warranties on the solar equipment they install and the type of workmanship warranty the company offers. A majority of solar equipment has a 25-year warranty, meaning you will be investing in a long-term solar PV system



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and, potentially, an equally long-term partnership with the company.

Overall, look closely at the math, and pick the solar PV system that gives you the best return for your money. Many systems will pay for themselves over a number of years, so choosing one to be installed by a well-regarded company can be a wise financial move.

OTHER SERVICES

Homeowners and business owners will often want more than just solar panels installed. It is important to choose a solar company that offers a wide range of services and additional products, such as a battery backup system or electric vehicle (EV) charging station that can be tied into the existing solar PV system.

A common myth is that solar energy systems mean you will have power even when the grid is down. This is not true unless you have a battery backup system paired with your solar PV system. Battery backup systems are great for those who want the capability to be off-grid.

Take into consideration the price of these systems when you compare bids. You should also consider what you would want or need powered by your battery or batteries during a power outage. Battery backup systems have to be sized to what your desired usage of the batteries and what you want versus need powered during a power outage.

With technology ever changing, EVs are becoming more and more common, so to have the ability to pair your solar PV system with an EV charging station is a huge bonus. From a business owner's standpoint, an EV charging station at your business could serve as a financial opportunity as well. Some EV chargers can be paired with a pay-per-charge structure, so you could entice people to come to your establishment to charge their

vehicle while they utilize your services. This tactic has been seen and proven financially ideal for places like hotels/motels, restaurants, grocery stores, retail stores and golf courses. When taking advantage of this financial opportunity, the EV charging station pays for itself in no time!

Electric vehicle charging stations and battery backup systems can be installed after an existing solar PV system has installed, so if you decide not to do it now, you can still do it down the road. Keep in mind, you might require an addition to your solar array; however, if you decide to add solar later, it never hurts to ask for a solar bid with these added components when you make your initial solar bids.

INCENTIVES

The solar company you are researching should be familiar with all of the state and federal incentives available to you and be able to provide you with all of these details. State incentives vary from state-to-state, so the solar company should be able to share what incentives potentially apply to you, depending where you live. Your solar PV system could be eligible for the federal incentive called the Investment Tax Credit (ITC), which is a tax credit in the amount of 30% of your solar PV system cost. It is encouraged to consult your financial advisor or tax preparer to verify if you qualify for the ITC.

Depending where you are located, you could be eligible for utility net-metering. Your solar company should be fully educated on net-metering and be able to tell you if this great incentive applies to you.

If you are looking for solar on your business, there are a variety of additional incentives you could be eligible for, including grants and depreciation of the solar equipment. When looking to go

solar, ensure you discuss this with your financial advisor and/or tax preparer to verify what incentives apply to you to ensure you have an accurate idea of what the return on investment would be going solar.

PURCHASING OPTIONS

Lastly, the solar companies you research should be able to provide you multiple financing options to ensure you are financially able to make this investment. There are three ways buyers typically purchase their solar PV system:

Paying Cash: The simplest and most direct way of paying for your system is by being a cash buyer. This route will allow you to be eligible to receive both the state and federal incentives to help offset the cost.

Loans: Both home equity loans and unsecured solar loans may be available to help you purchase your system. Some solar companies have partnered with local banking institutions to provide solar financing. Home equity loans may have the benefit of letting you deduct the interest from your income taxes.

Leases: Some solar companies lease your solar PV system with little to no down payment or upfront costs. A solar lease will let you make affordable monthly payments to your existing utility bills. You will not outright own the solar PV system and will have a lease term length. With lease systems, you usually do not receive the state and federal incentives; those incentive funds are absorbed by the solar company.

Are you ready to go solar? The team at Stateline Solar is ready and willing to be a resource and answer any questions during the research process.

Contact them at 815-580-3011 or visit the website at www.statelinesolar.net for more information.



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- **Federal Investment Tax Credit (ITC)**
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Improving storage in common areas

Increasing storage capabilities at home is a popular goal among many homeowners and renters. Despite how much space a person may have at home, there's often a desire to have more or maximize the areas that are there.

According to the Self-Storage Almanac, there are an estimated 51,206 storage facilities operating in the United States today, and MJ Partners Self-Storage Update says 11.1 percent of households currently rent at self-storage facilities. IBISWorld indicates the Canadian self-storage industry has grown at an average annual rate of 3.1 percent over the last five years.

People often turn to external storage facilities to house their belongings when space is at a premium at home. Others may focus their organization energy on closets, garages and basements to free up room. But common areas around the home also can provide additional sources of storage. Common areas are locations where people come together for activities.

LIVING ROOM/FAMILY ROOM

Living rooms and family rooms are areas of the home where people spend many hours. These tend to be multi-functional spaces where people entertain, lounge and even enjoy movies or gaming. Possibilities in these living spaces that can create extra storage include furniture that serves double-duty.

For example, a storage ottoman adds

decorative appeal but also can be filled with board games or books. Cabinet-style TV stands may not be as streamlined as mounted versions, but they're ideal places to stash games, remote controls and other accessories.

ENTRYWAY

An entryway or mudroom can quickly succumb to clutter. When organizing such a space, think about the needs of the household. A storage bench will be a place where everyone can sit to put on shoes, and then stow footwear underneath when not in use. A wall-mounted rack can hold the current season's jackets or sweaters, as well as purses or backpacks for easy access. A shelf with hooks can store keys or hold a basket to store the daily mail.

HALLWAY AND CLOSET

Closet organization systems can be the unsung heroes in closets utilized by multiple members of the family. These customizable components can be sized accordingly for the space, and then configured as needed with a balance of shelves and hanging racks. An out-of-the-way nook or long hallway can be enhanced with a bookshelf to hold photo albums or that library that only continues to grow as new reading material is acquired.

Homeowners can make common areas more functional with the addition of storage.

Signs it's time to repair or replace your deck

Spring is a season of rejuvenation that compels millions across the globe to quit hibernating and get back to enjoying the great outdoors. Spring also marks a great time to assess a home's exterior, including a deck where people will spend a lot of time in the warmer months to come.

Assessing a deck after winter can be eye-opening. Harsh winter weather can take its toll on a deck, and the following are some telltale signs that a deck could be in need of repair or replacement.

- **Wobbly underfoot and in hand:** Wobbly planks and railings are one sign of a deteriorating deck homeowners won't recognize as they hide from winter weather indoors. But these tend to reveal themselves rather quickly when examining a deck after winter.

Wobbly planks in the middle of the deck can be inconvenient, but wobbly steps and railings can be dangerous. According to the home improvement resource Angi, wobbly railings can be a byproduct of rot.

A local decking professional can assess the extent of the rot in railings and elsewhere and determine the best course of action. If the rot is isolated to an area or two, a simple repair may be all that's necessary. Extensive rot may require a full replacement of the existing deck.

- **Faded paint:** Many homeowners paint their wood decks, and that paint will not last forever. Faded paint can turn an otherwise lovely deck into an eyesore, and paint can fade over the winter. Thankfully, a local painter can address a faded deck and

may recommend some additional strategies to safeguard the deck against fading next winter and beyond.

- **Holes in the wood:** Many a homeowner has encountered curious-looking holes in their deck. This could be a sign of insect infestation. Termites, carpenter ants and carpenter bees are among the various types of insects that can bore holes through wood.

Homeowners who notice holes throughout their deck are urged to call a deck professional and/or pest control firm to assess the holes and offer a solution. Though small issues may be addressed with repairs, a deck littered with holes caused by insects may need a full replacement.

- **Rust:** Wood decks may be made of wood, but they can still exhibit signs of rust, namely in the nails and metal connectors that hold the deck together. If screws have rusted to the point where they are no longer holding the deck together, a full-scale replacement could be in the cards, as the deck could have substantial structural damage.

Like other issues that can reveal themselves during a springtime inspection of the deck, rust necessitates a thorough examination by an experienced decking professional.

Many people do not use their decks during winter, which only underscores the significance of a full deck inspection in spring.

(METRO CREATIVE)



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Turn your bedroom into a relaxing retreat

Bedrooms are more than places to lay our heads at the end of the day. Bedrooms serve different functions, and not all are conducive to relaxation.

People who use their bedrooms as a work space may find they're compromising their well-being by introducing activities into the bedroom. The Sleep Foundation says having an office in the bedroom blurs the lines between work and personal life, which can have serious effects on sleep. Rather, people should be looking to turn their bedrooms into relaxing retreats that offer a respite from the outside world.

- Remove blue-light emitting devices. Computers, tablets, smartphones, and other electronic devices emit blue light, which can compromise natural melatonin production in the body that contributes to sleep. Such devices should not be used at night in the bedroom.

- Use a neutral color palette. Neutral color palettes evoke a spa feeling. Walls can be painted white, beige or a light shade of gray. This can help the room feel calming and welcoming.

- Declutter the room. A sense of calm can be achieved simply by removing excess clutter. There is some evidence that the brain is more calm near an empty dresser, desk or clothes hamper. Therefore, removing excessive items from the room is a first step to making a nice retreat.

- Add soft lighting. Adjust the intensity and the color of the lighting in the bedroom. It should be subtle and warming. Dimmers enable homeowners to adjust lighting as needed.



- Install an electric fireplace. There is something to be said for the relaxing effects of gazing into the flames of a fire. A crackling (faux-wood) fire is an added layer of indulgence in a bedroom.
- Add an area rug. Even in rooms with carpeting, an area rug under the bed can further define the perimeter of the bed and add extra plushness underfoot.
- Invest in aromatherapy diffusers.

Certain smells can create a relaxing mood. These may be sandalwood, lavender or jasmine. Utilizing their preferred scents, homeowners can employ reed diffusers in their bedrooms to enjoy the aromas of natural oils.

- Used closed storage. Open shelves and visible closet interiors may not hide a mess. Exposure to clutter can contribute to feelings of anxiety. Store items that

shouldn't be on display behind closed doors or drawers.

- Bring in luxury linens. Homeowners should not skimp on comforters, sheets, duvet covers, and pillows for their beds. A cozy bed can serve as the centerpiece.

Turning a bedroom into a relaxing space can help individuals sleep better and reduce anxiety.

(METRO CREATIVE)

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Curt and Linda Knapp co-founded Top Notch in 1987. In their 29 years of leadership it grew from a \$600,000 home center to a \$4,500,000 building material dealer with land development, finance, and installed sales divisions.

Curt stepped away from the business over 10 years ago and Linda retired at the end of 2017. We proudly carry on the tradition they set forth of supplying quality products and expertise in the home building/improvement industry and providing quality jobs in the area.

John Behn

John works with our contractor and custom builder clients to help them grow and prosper their respective businesses. He is on the road nearly every day interacting with clients to make sure jobs are running smoothly and profitably.



John also works with homeowners for all sized projects. He is thorough and accurate and helps the staff around him to be the same. John's servant attitude draws clients to him because he is willing to be a superb teammate in order to help them grow their business. John's 30+ years of industry experience provide a wealth of knowledge that can be used to help solve challenges of every kind. Call John for help with your project.

Paul Shippy

Paul has nearly 25 years of experience in the building materials industry. Paul started as a counter salesman, has outside sales experience and has moved through purchasing, expense control and is now Chief Operating Officer at Top Notch.



As such Paul is responsible for overseeing all phases of the operations and for day to day operations training for all personnel. Contact Paul to consult about challenges you have with business, either yours or ours.

Adam Viel

Adam is our cabinet and floor covering leader. Adam's 15+ years of experience,

patient demeanor, and attention to detail make him a perfect fit for this work. Adam works hard with each customer to coordinate style, color, and efficiency so that each new owner and their respective contractor receive the result they desire on the interior appointments of their new or newly remodeled home. Adam also does a fair amount of plan design on kitchen, bath or addition and retrofit projects. Contact Adam for help with your kitchen, bath, or flooring project.



Scott Moore

Scott is our inside sales leader. Scott's 25+ years of experience in building and building materials have prepared him well to lead our inside sales force. Scott is our window, door, and trim expert and will help you choose just the right product for your needs. Scott's patience is appreciated by all who deal with him as they make important decisions regarding their home. Contact Scott for help with your project of any size.



Neil Suess

Neil is our warehouse foreman and driver. He is a very loyal and conscientious person who inspects your product as it comes off our vendor's truck. He is careful and concerned with each and every delivery. Neil also does most of the truck maintenance on our vehicles.



Tom Grant

Tom joined the Top Notch team in the spring of 2019 with over 30 years of experience in the cabinet and countertop industry. Tom can use his design experience to help you get the most out of your space. Stop in and see Tom for your cabinet and floor covering needs.



Dale Remmers

Dale came to Top Notch in 2015. Dale has a background in carpentry and is very knowledgeable in the field. Dale helps Scott to maintain the sales floor and assists customers as they visit our store. He is versed in pricing windows, doors, and most forms of millwork. If you need a special order hardware item Dale can help you out. He works at the hub of communication in the store to help get orders out in a timely manner.



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POPULAR TRENDS IN HOME EXTERIORS

Certain homes have an undeniable wow factor. That instant appeal tends to be noticeable the moment visitors pull up to the curb, and it might be a byproduct of homeowners' willingness to embrace the latest exterior design trends.

Trends come and go, but recognition of the current fashions can help homeowners create that highly sought-after wow factor. The following are some recent trends in home exteriors that have helped homeowners set their properties apart.

WOOD

Natural wood has undeniable appeal, and it hasn't only found newfound devotion among home interior decorators. 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. In addition to the garage door, natural wood entry doors and wood decks are popular ways to impart this classical, warm look.

PAINTED BRICK

Like natural wood, brick is a traditional material that's both sturdy and classical. But homeowners can add character to brick with a coat of paint, which has become a popular trend in recent years. Light tones tend to be most popular when painting bricks. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens note that this could prove a long-term commitment if homeowners so desire, as a properly painted brick exterior could last as long as 20 years.

HARDSCAPING

Hardscaping isn't a new trend, but it has been trending in recent years. Hardscaping is an umbrella term that includes everything from outdoor living rooms to incorporating natural stone into a landscape. Outdoor living rooms are one hardscaping trend that has become increasingly popular of late. These spaces serve as an extension of indoor living spaces. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that recently homeowners have looked to create covered outdoor rooms that can be enjoyed more frequently

Did you know?

A recent survey of home renovation industry professionals conducted by Fixr.com found that creating indoor spaces outdoors was homeowners' biggest priority regarding renovations in 2022.

Sixty-two percent of renovation-minded homeowners surveyed indicated outdoor dining areas are their most sought-after living space. In addition, 41 percent of respondents felt outdoor kitchens were their biggest priority.

The survey found that certain outdoor living space features were especially popular, none more so than comfortable outdoor furniture.

Firepits, outdoor fireplaces, swimming pools, hot tubs, and outdoor connectivity were some additional popular features among homeowners focused on their outdoor living spaces.



than patios or decks that are not protected from the elements.

OUTDOOR LIGHTING

It makes sense that individuals looking to spend more time enjoying their

properties outdoors would want more lighting outside. Ambient outdoor lighting can be utilized throughout a property. Such lighting can light up walkways and driveways and be used to light up landscaping features like trees and gardens.

Home design trends tend to be fickle. But recognition of the current trends in exterior home design can set homes apart and turn properties into awe-inspiring places to enjoy the great outdoors.

(METRO CREATIVE)

Turn your backyard into a relaxing respite

Backyards have long been places to unwind and enjoy some peace and quiet surrounded by nature.

Thanks in part to financial instability brought on by rising inflation and measures to tame it, homeowners may decide to forgo traditional vacations in favor of staying home this season. There's no better time to invest in a home, particularly outdoor spaces, to make them welcoming respites. The following are some ways to accomplish that goal.

Incorporate a water feature

The sound of trickling or bubbling water can make surroundings more serene. A low-maintenance water feature can help to create a calming ambiance. A fountain that does not require a collection pond will reduce the chance it becomes a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Locating the fountain out of the sun can keep algae growth at a minimum.

ADD LIGHTS FOR AMBIANCE

Outdoor lighting options include professionally installed, hardwired lights on the home itself or accent lighting that draws attention to trees or architectural structures on the property. It also may include twinkling lights, which some consider a must-have for any outdoor retreat. Lights come in all types and price points. Hang them on porches, pergolas or cement posts inside decorative planters and then string lights between the posts. This way the lighting can be moved around as desired.



LOUNGING SPOTS

A comfortable outdoor loveseat or chairs may be a focal point of the yard, but build in some additional cozy spots specifically for lounging around. Nestle a hammock in a quiet corner of the yard, or enhance a chaise lounge with throw pillows and a large umbrella for napping poolside.

ADD LUSHNESS WITH PLANTS

Plants can transform any space. Use a combination of planted varieties around the yard, then enhance certain areas with potted plants as needed. Plants can make an area more warm and inviting, plus they give butterflies, bees and hummingbirds places to stop by and visit. Consider the help of a professional landscaper to bring a vision of a lush, plant-filled retreat to life.

BLEND IN THE POOL OR SPA

With some unique landscape architecture, the pool or hot tub can be built right into the landscape, making it a cohesive part of the design. This can make the yard seem even more like an oasis, especially when the pool is flanked by a waterfall or bubbling fountain.

ADD SOME MUSIC

Thanks to wireless speakers that rely on Bluetooth technology, it's easy to have music piped right into the backyard. Set up a wireless speaker in an inconspicuous spot, such as inside a planter or in the rafters of a gazebo.

Turning a backyard into an oasis can provide the respite many people desire.

(METRO CREATIVE)

Luxury features home buyers desire

The real estate market has been something of a roller coaster ride over the past few years. Historically low interest rates coupled with a surging interest to move to communities with more outdoor space during the height of the pandemic led to a lot of movement and inventory and some of the highest home prices in some time.

The tides have started to change in recent months, as the housing market has been tepid at best since interest rates have increased. In the week ending August 24, 2023, the national average 30-year fixed mortgage rate pushed to 7.23 percent, while the National Association of Realtors said the median existing-home sales price was expected to surpass the all-time high of \$413,800. The stagnation of the market is caused by high interest rates, sellers not wanting to budge on prices, individuals wanting to sell but not being able to afford other homes, and a general decline in inventory related to each of these factors.

Individuals who are in position to buy right now may be more selective in what they are seeking in homes, particularly if they're spending top dollar. Current homeowners planning to put their homes on the market may want to consider these five luxury renovations to set their properties apart.

1. SMART HOME FEATURES

It's now common for new home builders to include smart home technology when building. Advanced home tech, like facial recognition for doors, intuitive home assistants, smart lights and outlets to control appliances from a smartphone app, and similar offerings can make a home more attractive.

2. MODERN OPEN FLOOR PLANS

Even though there has been some shift to buyers wanting homes with delineated borders, most still are drawn to those with open concepts. Those who are selling may want to investigate where they can open up rooms or take down walls to recreate these features.

3. OUTDOOR KITCHEN

A luxury indoor kitchen is still a major draw for buyers, but increasingly people are seeking properties that also maximize outdoor entertaining spaces. Having an outdoor kitchen with built-in grill, sink, counters for food preparation, and a refrigerator or wine chiller may be coveted. When an outdoor kitchen is near amenities like a spa, grand patio, pool, and other outdoor living spaces, the home really will beckon buyers.

4. SALTWATER POOLS

Pools have both pros and cons at resale. Therefore, sellers should speak with a realtor before installing a pool simply to make a home more appealing. However, if there already is a pool, converting the set-up to a saltwater system may win over buyers. Saltwater systems rely on fewer chemicals and proponents say the water feels more silky and less irritating.

5. UPGRADED OWNER'S SUITE

An owner's suite complete with luxury spa bath, walk-in closet with built-in storage, sitting area, and potentially access to an outdoor space will win raves with buyers.

Selling a home today is a bit more challenging, but luxury home features can tip the scales in sellers' favor.

(METRO CREATIVE)



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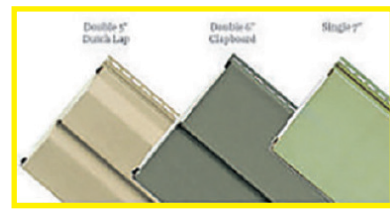
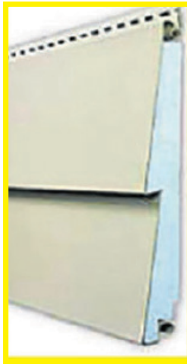
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