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Housing market closes year strong

Inventory remains very tight, according to state realtors association

The Wisconsin Realtors Association recently released its December 2024 Wisconsin Real Estate Report, noting a substantial increase in sales and very strong price appreciation for the existing home market.

Additionally, affordability remains a challenge; levels declined 10% over the last 12 months due to factors such as mortgage rates, price appreciation, and median income levels.

Year-end data shows 2024 sales were up 4.7% from their 2023 levels, and the median price rose 8.8% to \$310,000.

Chris DeVincentis, 2025 Chair of the Board of Directors, Wisconsin REALTORS Association, offered some winter home-buying advice.

“We saw the strongest December sales since 2021 even as affordability fell over that period. This good sign indicates that buyers who work with a realtor during winter may find opportunities that would be unavailable during the peak season,” DeVincentis said.

“Sellers in the winter are often highly motivated to sell and likely open to price concessions compared to peak months,” he added.

Tom Larson, President & CEO, Wisconsin Realtors Association, compared the state’s affordability to other areas.

“There is no doubt that Wisconsin’s housing affordability has been declining since mortgage rates bottomed out in 2020. However, the Midwest fortunately has higher affordability than all other regions of the country,” Larson said.

“This is primarily due to the Midwest’s lower housing prices, which averaged just under \$305,000 in November. By comparison, National Association of Realtors data showed November prices 21% higher in the South, 60% higher in the Northeast, and 110% higher in the West,” Larson added.

David Clark, Professor Emeritus of Economics and WRA Consultant, said he hopes for reduced federal deficits in the future.

“Declining affordability closely ties to mortgage rates, which ended 2024 at levels similar to January 2024. Although the Fed lowered the short-term Federal Funds rate by 1% in the fall, mortgage rates more closely track the yield of 10-year treasury bonds,” Clark said.

“Think of the bond yield as the guaranteed annual interest rate paid when



Year-end data shows 2024 sales were up 4.7% from their 2023 levels. However, affordability remains a challenge; levels declined 10% over the previous 12 months due to factors such as mortgage rates, price appreciation, and median income levels, according to the Wisconsin Realtors Association.

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purchasing a bond. Those yields rose a full percentage point during Q4, corresponding with a half percent increase in the 30-year fixed mortgage rate in that time span. The treasury bond yields will likely stay high as long as there are large deficits that need to be financed with treasury bonds. Hopefully federal deficits are reduced in the next administration,” Clark added.

Report highlights

The existing home market heated up in December with a substantial spike in sales and very strong price appreciation. December home closings jumped 9.2% compared to their levels 12 months earlier, and the median price rose 13% to \$305,000.

December growth in sales was stronger than any month since May of last year, and the media price appreciation in the final month of last year was the strongest of 2024.

A review of year-end data shows sales for all of 2024 were up 4.7% from their

2023 levels, and the median price rose 8.8% to \$310,000.

Total statewide listings of homes in December were 3.8% higher than December 2023. However, new listings in December 2024 fell 3.7% compared to their level 12 months earlier, even as sales increased 9.2% over that same period. In fact, December closings were 62% higher than new listings.

Strong demand and weak supply created a strong seller’s market with just 2.7 months of available supply, which is unchanged from December 2023. This is well below the six-month benchmark that indicates a balanced housing market.

The average 30-year fixed mortgage rate was 6.72% in December, which is only slightly lower than the 6.82% average rate of December 2023.

Persistently high mortgage rates, robust appreciation of median home prices, and relatively flat levels of median family income led to a 10% decline in statewide housing affordability over the last 12 months.

The Wisconsin Housing Affordability Index measures the percent of the median-priced home that a potential buyer with median family income qualifies to purchase, assuming 20% down with the remaining balance financed with a 30-year fixed mortgage at current rates. The index fell from 140 in December of last year to 126 in December 2024.

About the WRA

The Wisconsin Realtors Association is one of the largest trade associations in the state, headquartered in Madison.

The WRA represents and provides services to more than 17,500 members statewide, made up of real estate sales agents, brokers, developers, appraisers, inspectors, bankers and other professionals who touch real estate.

The association is under the direction of a statewide board of directors, comprised of members from the top real estate firms around the state.

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Projected timelines for renovation projects



A number of variables play into the length of time needed

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. The following are 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.

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.

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.

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.

Remodeling a home often involves a considerable investment of time and money. Knowing how long a homeowner will be inconvenienced by the work can help the household plan accordingly.



A recent report found that the average time spent planning a kitchen renovation in 2023 was 9.6 months, while the building took just over five months. Additional projects featured a similar disparity between the time to plan and the time to build. **top:** Homeowners spent almost twice as much time planning their kitchen renovations in 2023 as it took for the projects to be completed. Kitchen remodels, for example, can take anywhere from six to 12 weeks.

Did you know?

Planning plays an integral role in the home improvement process, and it's perhaps a more time-consuming component of renovations than homeowners realize.

According to the "2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study" from Houzz Research, homeowners spent almost twice as much time planning their kitchen renovations in 2023 as it took for the projects to be completed.

The researchers behind the report found that the average time spent planning a kitchen renovation in 2023 was 9.6 months, while the building took just over five months. Additional projects featured a similar disparity between the time to plan and the time to build.

For example, homeowners spent more than eight months planning living room renovations, which then took an additional four-plus months to complete.

Even smaller projects like closet renovations required ample planning (six 1/2 months) that more than doubled the time required to complete the project (just over three months).

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Newly built apartments starting to fill up faster

By Mark Worley and Sheharyar Bokhari
CONTRIBUTORS

More than half (54%) of newly constructed apartments completed in the first quarter were rented out within three months, bouncing back from a four-year-low of 47% a quarter earlier.

That's still the second-lowest seasonally adjusted share recorded in a quarter since mid-2020 and down from 58% a year earlier.

That's according to a Redfin analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's seasonally adjusted absorption rate data dating back to the first quarter of 2012 for unfurnished, unsubsidized, privately financed rental apartments in buildings with five or more units.

The most recent data available measures apartments that were completed in the first quarter of 2024, and either rented or not rented within three months of then.

The uptick from the previous quarter may be a sign that building owners are attracting renters with more affordable rents and concessions.

The absorption rate for new apartments was slower in 2024 than the previous two years because of a spike in new apartments being built.

"With only around half of new apartments renting out within three months, not only do renters have more choices, they also likely have the ability to negotiate a better deal," said Redfin Senior Economist Sheharyar Bokhari.

"There's a huge number of new apartments opening up, and building owners are competing with one another to fill them up quickly," he added.

Nationally, the rental vacancy rate for buildings with five or more units was 7.8% in the second quarter, up from 7.4% a year earlier, further indicating that supply is slightly outpacing demand.

Studio apartments filling up faster as completions fall

With less inventory available, studios filled up slightly faster than other bedroom types, with 58% rented out within three months, up from 42% a year earlier.

Studio apartments were the only type to see completions fall in the first quarter, dropping 7.1% from a year earlier.

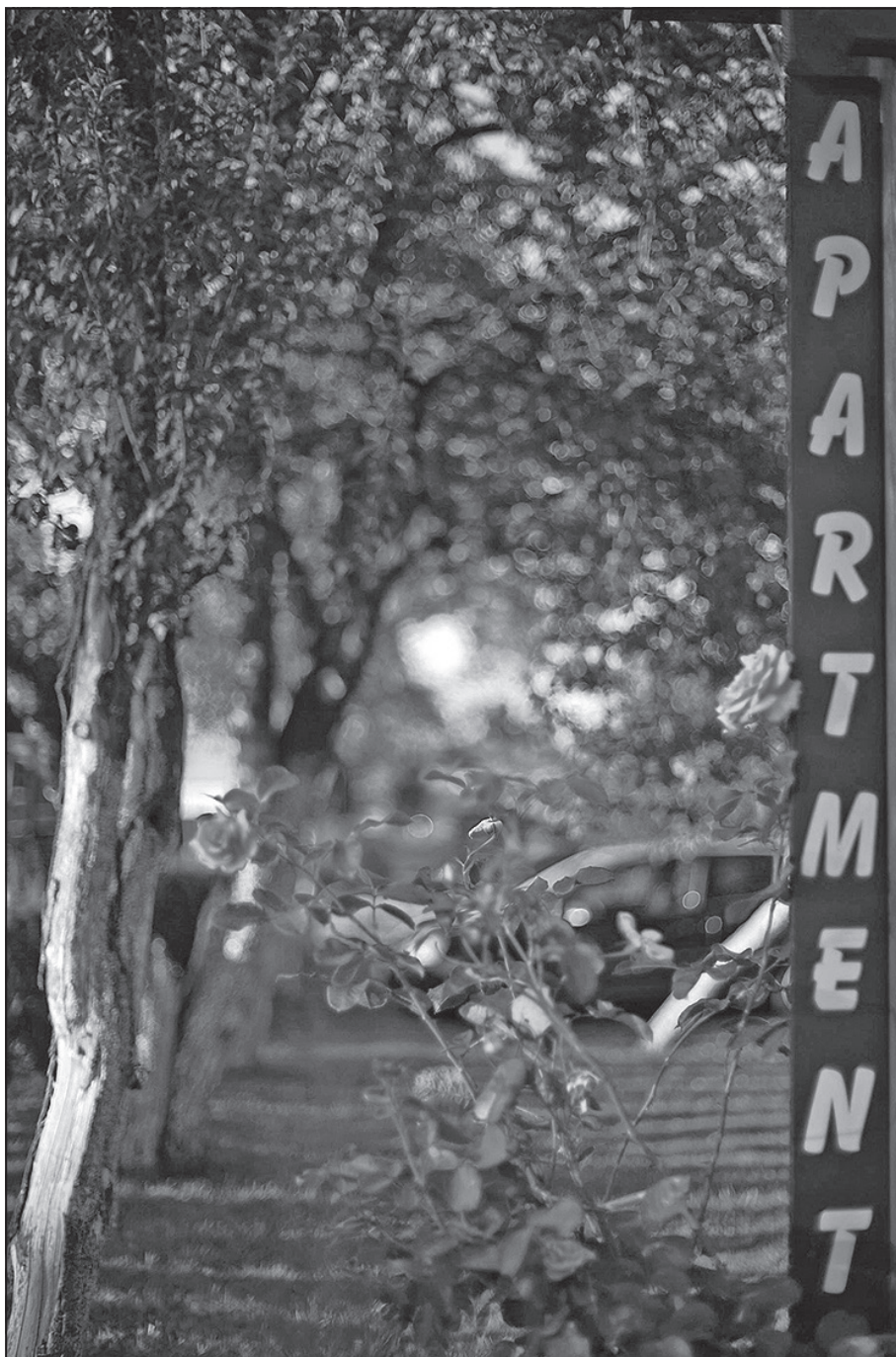
In comparison, 53% of new one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments were rented out within three months, down from 58% a year earlier. Completions for both one- and two-bedroom rentals jumped more than 20% in the first quarter, year over year.

New three-plus-bedroom apartments – the rarest bedroom type – saw the biggest slowdown from a year earlier, with 53% rented out within three months, down from 65% a year earlier. This came after a modest rise in completions (+5%).

Note that absorption rate data by bedroom type is not seasonally adjusted.

Mark Worley is a data journalist who helps explain economic factors impacting the housing market.

Sheharyar Bokhari does research that focuses on better understanding the housing market.



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PEXELS.COM PHOTOS Homes & Design

Six features of industrial décor that can set your home apart

Home decor is as varied as the people who decorate their homes. Some people prefer traditional styles while others gravitate toward country or coastal. Industrial decor is another unique style that can set homes apart.

The Interior Design Institute says industrial design is known for its raw beauty and functional charm. Industrial design continues to be a popular choice that evolves with each new generation. Industrial design pays homage to warehouses and city centers. For those looking to impart a new look to their homes, industrial chic may be the right fit. The following are six notable characteristics of this unique style.

1. Neutral colors: Whites, grays, blacks, and neutral tones of brown feature prominently in industrial design. However, accent colors like red, blue or green also may be used.

2. Sense of spaciousness: Industrial design harkens back to vast, open warehouses. Open floor plans are part of the design, as are tall ceilings and large windows.

3. Exposed wood or steel beams: Showing the "bones" of the building is on brand for industrial design. Expect exposed steel or wood beams in the ceilings. Additional exposed structural elements include ducts, brick and pipes.

4. Recycled elements: Industrial decor may utilize reclaimed or recycled materials, such as salvaged wood, concrete, pieces of metal, or even stone.

5. Natural light: Industrial decor utilizes large windows to let in plenty of natural light. This can counteract the harsher lines of the exposed materials and graphic lines of the style.

6. Edison bulbs: Edison bulbs that hang individually or in decorative groups as a chandelier are another common element of industrial design. Metal domes or pendant lights also can be incorporated for a more covered look.



Industrial design is alive and well in the hearts of modern homeowners who enjoy it as a wholly unique design and architectural style.

METRO CREATIVE PHOTO Homes & Design

How to find the right real estate agent

Working with a real estate agent can give both buyers and sellers an edge in what continues to be a challenging real estate market. Agents, brokers and realtors are professionals who have distinct expertise and knowledge of the process of buying and selling homes. That expertise is evidenced by how many people rely on real estate professionals each year.

A recent Zillow Group Consumer Housing Trends report found 88 percent of homeowners choose to list their homes with a real estate agent when it comes time to sell. Individuals understand that it can be in their best interests to work with real estate professionals, but they may not know where to look as they seek to work with one. Here are some tips for finding the right match in a real estate professional.

Know the difference in real estate professionals

Real estate agents are required by the state in which they operate to pass a real estate license exam. Real estate brokers take it a step further and undergo additional training, which could bring additional experience to the table. Realtors® are members of the National Association of Realtors® and beholden to its strict code of ethics. These individuals also may have undergone additional training that qualifies them to work with certain types of clients, such as seniors.

Seek referrals

Friends or family members, or even others in the community, can put people in

touch with real estate professionals. When asking for referrals, individuals can inquire about certain professionals and how they handled buying and/or selling a home.

Work with the right type of agent

Generally speaking, real estate agents either work with buyers or sellers in the transaction. Many will do both, but some specialize in buying or selling. Find a professional who either does both or specializes in your position.

Research an agent's online presence

Use the internet to see if the agent has a website, a particular philosophy or a specialty. This also may be a place to check online reviews. Don't be dissuaded by one or two poor reviews. However, if there are many, it may be best to look elsewhere.

Meet and interview potential agents

Individuals should speak with a couple of real estate professionals to see what they offer. This is a good way to determine if there is a connection there, and whether the agent will get the results needed. A well-prepared agent will come with data, including "comps" of properties in the area. Professionals typically have information about the current market trends and a portfolio of the homes they have brokered recently.

Go with gut instincts

If it's between two people of equal qualification, select the person with whom



Individuals understand that it can be in their best interests to work with real estate professionals, but they may not know where to look as they seek to work with one. Consider these tips for finding the right match in a real estate professional.

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you have a stronger rapport. This person will be guiding you through a sizable financial transaction, so comfort level is important.

Finding the right real estate professional

can take some time. But the right professional will guide clients through the often complex and occasionally frustrating process of buying or selling property.

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Home interior trends rising

Trends that seem ubiquitous one day can seemingly vanish before the sun rises again just 24 hours later. That's especially true in the digital age, when overnight celebrities and viral videos can be on the tips of everyone's tongue before being forgotten entirely when the next online sensation emerges in an increasingly rapid news cycle.

Home trends typically benefit from a longer shelf life than viral videos and other fads that originate on the internet, and that's something renovation-minded homeowners should consider when improving their homes. Homeowners preparing to do just that can consider these notable trends, which the online renovation experts at Houzz suggest will be particularly popular in the year ahead.

- **Rounded furnishings:** Houzz noted that gentle curves and rounded edges embody the organic modern styles that many current homeowners love. Rounded dining tables and similarly circular coffee tables may merit consideration among homeowners who want to embrace popular trends.

- **Arches:** Houzz cites arches among the more popular modern trends, and the experts at Better Homes & Gardens note this unique, eye-catching style has been gaining popularity for several years. Better Homes & Gardens suggests that part of the appeal of arched doorways could be their deviation from a more traditional door shape. That uniqueness draws the attention of residents and visitors alike, and Houzz notes that arched windows, cabinets and even millwork details are part of the pivot toward arches.

- **Stove alcoves:** If it's a touch of history homeowners want, kitchen range alcoves might be just the project for them. Range alcoves call an earlier time to mind when wood burning stoves were commonplace. The report from Houzz notes range alcoves immediately draw attention, which undoubtedly adds to their appeal.

- **Wood for warmth:** Homeowners who hear "wood and warmth" might think fireplaces, but Houzz reports that wood elements are being incorporated into interior designs as a means to giving homes a more cozy vibe. Ceiling beams, trim, wall paneling, and cabinetry are utilizing wood to add warmth to a home.

Trends come and go, but home trends typically have more staying power than styles that emerge in other arenas. Homeowners who want to upgrade their home interiors can consider the latest trends and choose those that align with their own personal tastes.



AI in homebuying: Separating fact from fiction

The homebuying journey has undergone a radical transformation in the digital age. Long gone are the days of sifting through stacks of paperwork, replaced by a streamlined, tech-driven consumer experience.

As part of this progression, artificial intelligence (AI) is being woven into the fabric of daily life and has the potential to have a massive effect on the path to homeownership, offering tools that make finding and purchasing a home easier than ever before.

HOW AI CHANGES HOMEBUYING

AI has the power to streamline the mortgage process – often the most daunting part of homebuying. A recent report by LiveVox found that AI-driven customer experiences scored 20% higher in satisfaction than traditional human-led approaches.

Companies such as Rocket Mortgage are now automating document collection, verifying information instantly and even showing loan officers the best mortgage products for their clients.

This efficiency speeds up the process and increases confidence for consumers.

"AI is not just a technological advancement, it is a transformative force reshaping the homebuying landscape," said Brian Woodring, Chief Information Officer for Rocket Mortgage.

"AI is the compass guiding us toward a future where homeownership is accessible and stress free for everyone," Woodring added.

Beyond the financing, remote home tours – powered by AI –

can virtually transport shoppers to a prospective home, letting them explore every nook and cranny with 360-degree views.



Artificial intelligence has the potential to have a big effect on the path to home ownership, via tools that may make it easier and faster for many to enjoy a new home, with human involvement.

NAPS PHOTOS
Homes & Design

AI-driven platforms can also sift through mountains of listings to recommend homes that match a buyer's preferences, budget and lifestyle, creating a personalized experience and saving countless hours of manual search.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN ROLES WITH AI

While AI is certainly transformative, it is not a one-size-fits-all solution. When it comes to such things as credit decisioning, humans still take the lead.

Credit decisions are complex and nuanced, requiring a deep understanding of a person's financial history and current circumstances.

AI can provide data and options, but the final call should always be made by a human who can interpret the subtleties and make an informed decision.

Moreover, AI cannot replace the personal touch of a real estate agent or the reassurance and expertise of a loan officer. These human

interactions and relationships are vital to the homebuying experience, providing knowledge, negotiation skills and emotional support that AI simply cannot replicate.

This combination of AI with the human touch is already showing results. In fact, over the last year, Rocket Mortgage saw it help shorten the amount of time it takes their clients to close on a home purchase by nearly 20%.

AI can handle the heavy lifting of data processing and provide valuable insights, but it takes a backseat where humans perform best—building meaningful connections.

THE FUTURE OF HOMEBUYING

As consumers embark on their homeownership adventure, AI will open doors while the professionals will help them cross the threshold into their new home.

For further facts and stats on buying a home, visit www.rocketmortgage.com.



Lighting is an important part of any design.
METRO CREATIVE Homes & Design

Popular types of lighting that can complete home decor

Many components come together to create a home interior that is welcoming and comfortable. Lighting is an important part of any design and plays a key role in home decor. Lighting can change the atmosphere of a room with the flip of a switch. Through lighting, one can make a space seem more cozy, or even make small spaces seem more expansive.

Homeowners should not underestimate the power of lighting in their homes. In addition to making spaces functional and more attractive, lighting can affect personal well-being, as a well-lit room can benefit mental health. The following are various types of lighting and how they can work best in a home.

Ambient

Ambient lighting is blanket lighting that is used to evenly illuminate a room. Lowes Home Improvement says this is the general lighting that every home needs. Fixtures like overhead lights, floor lamps and more provide enough light for people to function safely indoors. Ambient lighting is the foundation for every interior lighting scenario, and ambient lighting fixtures should be featured toward the center of the room and closer to the ceiling to disperse light more efficiently.

Task lighting

The home improvement firm Hiller describes task lighting as lighting directed toward a specific area to give more detail

to objects. Close-range work such as crafting, reading, cooking, and desk work requires task lighting so projects are effectively illuminated. Task lighting can be installed anywhere a person requires direct, intense light to see details. This means lights can be under cabinetry or on a desk for reading mail or homework.

Accent lighting

Lowes indicates that accent lighting balances lighting and spotlights certain points in a space. For example, accent lighting can be utilized to highlight collectibles or artwork. Accent lighting may call attention to entryways, plants, fireplaces, or other points. Accent lighting typically adds character to a room and is not necessarily bright enough to sufficiently illuminate a space.

Decorative lighting

Decorative lighting is used exclusively for aesthetic purposes, according to BLOCC House of Interiors. It adds style and drama to spaces. Decorative lighting fixtures include pendants, sconces, chandeliers, and more. Decorative lighting also may be whimsical, such as fairy lights strung in a child's bedroom or neon lights in a home bar or sports room.

Separately, these lighting options may not be enough to suit your needs. But when combined, these types of lighting help to establish an interesting and functional home interior design that fits with a person's lifestyle and needs.



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Dining room conversion ideas

There are many ways to convert the space into something usable

Many homeowners can undoubtedly take a stroll through their homes and find at least one space that could be repurposed to provide more functionality.

Real estate professionals know that such sentiments are not uncommon, and many point to formal dining rooms as spaces that have fallen out of favor in recent years.

Formal dining rooms were once common in newly built homes, but the pivot toward open concept floor plans left it up to homeowners to decide if such spaces were for them.

In a recent book published by the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, authors used cameras to monitor life in many people's homes, including how they used each room. The authors concluded that formal dining rooms were rarely used for eating.

If that sounds a lot like home to many current homeowners, then it might be time to consider some ideas to convert formal dining rooms to make these spaces more functional.

Home office

Though the percentage of professionals working remotely has dipped considerably since the end of the pandemic, hybrid working is perhaps among

the more lasting work-related byproducts of it.

In its Global State of Remote and Hybrid study published in early 2024, the career networking resource LinkedIn noted that 13 percent of jobs posted to the platform were for hybrid positions. That means millions of workers can still utilize an accommodating home office space.

A formal dining room can be converted to provide such a space, and the good news is that such a conversion need not require extensive renovations. A fresh coat of paint, an additional outlet or two and perhaps a new overhead lighting fixture can instantly transform the space at minimal cost.

Reading room/library

Homeowners who dream of having a designated space for quiet reading can convert a little-used formal dining room into a space to curl up with a good book.

Some comfortable armchairs, built-in bookshelves and perhaps an expanded floor-to-ceiling window overlooking a side or backyard can help homeowners create a home library that will be the envy of any avid reader.

Studio space

If there's a resident yogi and/or artist living under the roof, then converting a dining room into a yoga or art studio, or perhaps even a hybrid space for those who enjoy both activities, is a no-brainer.

A yoga studio conversion may not require as much investment as a kitchen overhaul or bathroom renovation, but an ideal home yoga space

requires more than a mat and room to stretch.

The Yogapreneur Collective notes that flooring in a yoga studio should be non-slip, easily cleaned, durable, sound-absorbing, and low maintenance. The Collective asserts that different flooring materials may be ideal for certain types of yoga, noting that cork flooring is a go-to choice for professional studios that offer hot yoga.

Similarly, the right flooring for an art studio may depend on the artist's preferred medium, whether it's oil painting, arts and crafts or another artistic pursuit. But any artist knows that a floor that's easy to clean is perhaps best for a home art studio.

Additional ideas

Some additional ways to repurpose a dining room include a gaming room for avid gamers, a memorabilia showcase for collectors or a pantry for foodies who love to cook but need some extra space to store ingredients and tools of the trade.

If a formal dining room is only utilized on occasion, homeowners may want to consider the many ways to convert such spaces into areas that are more usable every day.

(METRO CREATIVE)

Many real estate professionals point to formal dining rooms as spaces that have fallen out of favor in recent years. It might be time to consider some ideas to convert them to make these areas more functional, such as home office space.

METRO CREATIVE Homes & Design

The benefits of neutral colors

Homeowners make many notable decisions when designing their home interiors, with some choices proving bolder than others.

The decision to decorate with neutral colors might not be the boldest move homeowners can make, but there are numerous reasons to stay neutral with a color scheme.

Versatility

Neutral colors afford homeowners endless opportunities to play around with textures, patterns, furnishings, and more. For example, a neutral color on a living room wall can ensure a boldly colored couch or chair won't contrast with its surroundings.

In fact, there's no end to the options homeowners have to customize the look of a room with bold features or furnishings when neutral colors featured prominently in the space.

- Flexibility: Neutral colors are more flexible than bolder alternatives because they likely won't require a complete overhaul of a room when homeowners want to spice things up with new features and furnishings. That flexibility will be appreciated by homeowners who every so often like to experiment with a new vibe or look in their homes.

- Trendy: Neutral colors are not as vulnerable to trends as other design choices. In fact, neutral colors are effectively their own trend and won't get in the way of homeowners who want to



change things up. But unlike other trends that must be replaced when homeowners grow tired of them, neutral colors can remain thanks to their compatibility with so many styles.

- Tranquility: Homes are often characterized as their owners' private sanctuaries from the hustle and bustle that goes on outside those walls, and

neutral colors are often lauded for the tranquil vibe they help to create in a space. Neutral colors are soft, and that can lend a serene and calming atmosphere to the interior spaces of a home.

- Brightness: Neutral colors are lighter in tone and thus pair well with natural light. That mixture can amplify

brightness within a home and give it an uplifting vibe that residents and guests alike will appreciate.

Neutral colors are not bold, but the benefits they provide open doors to an array of design styles and decor choices that enable homeowners to go in various directions with the interior spaces in their homes.

Neutral colors are more flexible than bolder alternatives because they likely won't require a complete overhaul of a room when homeowners want to spice things up with new features and furnishings.

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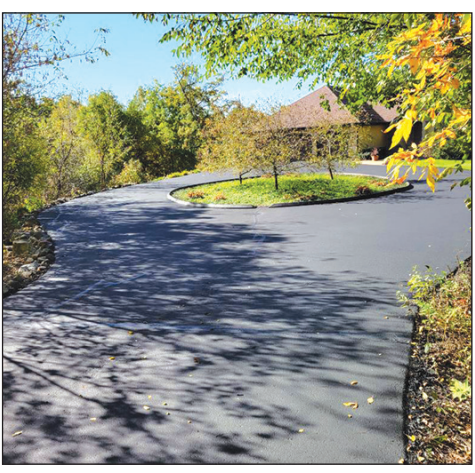
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Why hiring a painter is the right choice

Few home improvements can change the look of a room faster and more affordably than a painting makeover. In fact, homeowners often turn to paint before they make any other renovations. Home Light, a real estate technology company, says painting a home's interior can net a return on investment as high as 107 percent.

Although painting is a project that can be tackled by do-it-yourselfers, there are various advantages to calling in a professional to handle painting projects. Here is a look at some of the benefits to working with a professional painter.

Cut down on the job time

A professional painter can reduce the project timeline. Painters have the skill set and experience to complete a project in a timely manner. This means the job will be streamlined from preparation to clean-up.

Pay attention to details

Professional painters are likely to do a job that is nearly flawless, especially after homeowners exercise their due diligence and vet painters carefully. Professionals will pay attention to the small details that less experienced painters wouldn't think about.

Reduce your workload

Painting can be a time-consuming job, and most of it occurs even before you pick up a brush. It can take hours to prep walls, patch holes, remove moldings, and apply painter's tape. Homeowners who do not have much time are better off leaving trusting the project to a professional.

Painters already have equipment

Do-it-yourselfers may need to buy new tools before beginning the job. This means brushes, rollers, tape, tarps, trays,



A fresh coat of paint can produce amazing results. Leaving the work to a professional can ensure a job is done correctly and beautifully and completed on time.

METRO CREATIVE Homes & Design

and much more. Unless you plan to paint multiple times, this can make stocking up a considerable investment. Professionals already have all the right gear and tools of the trade.

Lasting results

Professional painters understand which products will produce the desired results, depending on the wear and tear of the space.

Paints are not all created equal, and certain walls, floors and trim may require unique priming and preparation that novices are not familiar with. Professional painters can help ensure durability and save homeowners from having to do the job again in a few months or years.

A safer experience

Painting can be a challenging job when

it involves painting hard-to-reach spaces and/or climbing and balancing on tall ladders.

Homeowners are not at risk of injury when hiring a professional painter. In addition, professional painters should be licensed and insured. This means if an injury or incident occurs, the homeowner will not be on the hook for the cost.

(METRO CREATIVE)

Earthy colors dominate decorating trends in 2025

Change is in the air when a new year arrives. People often use the turn of the calendar as an opportunity to redecorate living spaces or revamp their wardrobes.

As individuals narrow down their projects, they may want to incorporate a fresh and trendy palette of colors. For 2025, the options are decidedly warm, cozy and earthy.

Industry color experts routinely recommend hues that can elevate homes, offices and other spaces. The following is a selection of shades that insiders predict will color the world for the coming year.

Quietude

Sherwin-Williams has named Quietude its color of the year. This soft sage color exudes serenity and understated luxury. Grayish-green with a touch of blue, Quietude is a soothing color of tranquility. Sherwin-Williams also offers a Color Collection of the Year that includes Convivial Yellow, Spiced Cider, and Nomadic Desert, among others.

Mocha Mousse

The title of Pantone® Color of the Year 2025 belongs to Mocha Mousse. Just as the name implies, this rich, warm brown suggests the intoxicating qualities of coffee and chocolate. It can create a feeling of comfort in any space, or even serve as the basis of a chocolate wardrobe color palette. According to Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone

Color Institute, Mocha Mousse is "sophisticated and lush, yet at the same time an unpretentious classic."

Purple Basil

Glidden's 2025 color of the year title belongs to Purple Basil, a dusty, neutral violet purple hue with mauve undertones. It embraces rich, warm energy, and is equally at home in a bedroom as it is in a dining room.

Cinnamon Slate

Cinnamon Slate is moody and introspective. This Benjamin Moore color blends rich plum and chocolate brown that the company calls "adaptable, yet distinct." In fact, it is quite similar to Glidden's color of the year, but a tad more brown in nature.

Caramelized

Homeowners may want to consider Caramelized, an earthy terracotta brown that is Dunn-Edwards' 2025 Color of the Year. Caramelized is versatile and elegant, and it complements both modern and vintage interiors.

Elderton

Paula Taylor, Graham & Brown's head stylist and trend specialist, calls Elderton "a chameleon color that can be sophisticated yet cozy." This medium brown is contemporary with a huge amount of depth. It may work in a rustic living room or a cozy library.



The 2025 color trends are described as being "decidedly warm, cozy and earthy." Among this year's colors are Quietude by Sherwin-Williams, Purple Basil, by Glidden, and Caramelized by Dunn-Edwards.

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What is a quiet room?

(And why you should create one at home)

Home for most people is a sanctuary that offers comfort, familiarity and a place to gather with family and friends. Although home can be a welcoming place, with so many people in the average household humming along from day to day, it may not always be the most serene setting.

From teenagers playing video games to video meetings in a home office to dogs barking at the postal worker doing daily rounds, there are plenty of potentially distracting sounds in and around a home.

Lawn care workers with their mowers and blowers also may contribute to ambient noise. A dedicated quiet room can be beneficial for anyone, and most especially for people who experience sensory issues.

What is a quiet room?

A quiet room is a space where a person can enjoy peace and quiet in a distraction-free environment. According to designer Rachel Cannon, "a quiet room is a sanctuary from the stimulation and overwhelm that we encounter every day."

A quiet room may go by various names, including a mindfulness room or cozy cove, but the common goal is to remove as many sensory distractions as possible so that an individual can disconnect from

the outside world and reap some calming benefits.

According to School Specialty, LLC, an education resource provider, schools are now providing quiet rooms for over-stimulated students, and homeowners can take similar cues to create these relaxing retreats at home.

How to create a quiet room

The first step in establishing a quiet room is to identify a location that is far away from the main action of the household. A bedroom, basement, nook in the garage, or even an attic can be a good spot for a quiet room.

Soundproofing the space can make it even more inviting. Sounds will bounce off of walls and floors, but acoustic panels can help muffle noises. If acoustic panels are not in the design plan, thicker draperies, wallpaper, carpeting, and wall art can help counteract echoes and noise infiltration. Soft furniture also can absorb sound.

Small rooms work better as quiet spaces, as such areas can feel more cozy. Less is needed to decorate the space if it is on the smaller side. Bring in warm, soft lighting and soft decor. A sound machine playing favorite ocean or natural sounds also can mask outside noises even more.

Establish rules that govern the quiet space is to be used. When someone is inside the area, they should not be disturbed.

If possible, use the quiet room during naturally quiet times of the day. Keep the room stocked with books, journals, crafting items, or whatever it is you need to unwind and relax.

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Right: Landscape lighting adds notable aesthetic appeal to a home at a fraction of the cost of other renovation projects. The benefits such lighting provides make the project one every homeowner can consider.



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Homeowners planning outdoor living space projects may find themselves choosing between a deck and pavers. Each option can work, and homeowners may even want to combine the two.

METRO CREATIVE Homes & Design

How to decide between a deck or pavers in an outdoor remodel

Outdoor living spaces have become sought-after commodities among homeowners. A 2022 survey of homeowners conducted by the New Home Trends Institute found that open yards are less appealing to home buyers than they once were.

The survey noted that just 28% of respondents chose open yards, while 65% preferred patios and 55% chose decks. Green spaces remain popular, but the survey indicates that many would-be home buyers also want an outdoor living area to make the most of their home exteriors.

Homeowners aspiring to transform their home exterior spaces typically must decide between a deck or pavers when the time comes to plan such areas.

That's a personal choice homeowners must make, but those without strong feelings on either option can consider these tips as they try to decide if a deck or pavers are for them.

- Determine your budget. Budget is a notable variable with any home renovation project, and the addition of an outdoor living space is no exception. The materials homeowners choose will ultimately determine the cost of each project.

For example, composite decking materials tend to cost significantly more than wood decks, but that higher price tag also comes with less maintenance and typically a longer life span.

Pavers may prove less expensive than composite decking, but those cost savings may be negligible if a yard requires extensive excavation to prepare an area for a new patio.

It requires patience, but gathering estimates of the various materials can serve as a good starting point when planning an

outdoor living space.

In addition, homeowners must recognize that material costs can fluctuate considerably over time, as such prices are often contingent on a range of variables, including supply chain issues. So it's best to gather estimates in a short period of time to make the most accurate price comparisons.

- Identify your vision for the space. Homeowners who have a vision for their outdoor living space, even if they are not sure about which material they prefer, may find the process goes more quickly and even more smoothly than those who are unsure about what they want.

Those who prefer a flexible multi-use space may be best going with pavers, as the spaces can be easily converted and areas simply designated as one might differentiate between rooms inside the home.

For example, an outdoor living room can be separated with the installation of a pavillion and fireplace, while kitchen and dining areas can be separate spaces on the same patio.

Decks tend to be less flexible, which might make them ideal for homeowners who prefer an outdoor dining area but don't need a more expansive entertaining space. Of course, decks can be as big as homeowners choose, which can make the spaces more multi-functional.

- Recognize both may be in your best interest. Homeowners also should know that many outdoor living spaces feature both a deck and a paver patio.

Homeowners may like an elevated deck that steps down to a patio, which can easily distinguish between the spaces and establish the area as a multifunctional space.

The benefits of lighting up your landscape

Homeowners know there's no shortage of ways to tweak a property. Some homeowners may lament that the work associated with home ownership is never done, but owning a house also provides endless opportunities to upgrade the spaces people call home.

Landscape lighting has become increasingly popular in recent years. That popularity is undoubtedly due to a number of variables, and each highlights a benefit of installing landscape lighting around a property.

- **Affordability:** Some may think of big budget projects like kitchen remodels or room additions when pondering home renovations. Such projects can have a dramatic impact on the look and feel of a home, but landscape lighting can be equally transformative at a fraction of the cost of larger undertakings. The home renovation experts at Angi.com estimate the average landscape lighting project costs around \$4,000, making affordability a notable benefit of the project.

- **Appearance:** There's no denying the aesthetic appeal of a well-lit landscape at night. Landscape lighting can be utilized to draw attention to awe-inspiring components of a landscape, whether it's natural features like gardens and foliage or manmade components like architectural features.

Improved appearance can increase curb appeal, which is often associated with how a home looks during daylight hours.

But photographs of a well-lit nighttime landscape can impress buyers as well.

- **Cost savings:** Landscape lighting might help homeowners reduce the cost of their homeowners insurance. Researchers at PolicyGenius.com found that insurance companies typically offer a discount of 2 to 5 percent to homeowners who install a home security system. Insurance providers may offer additional savings to homeowners who pair such systems with landscape lighting, which can be a deterrent to burglars who prefer to operate under a cloak of darkness.

- **Safety:** Insurance firms may discount premiums because of landscape lighting because they view it as a deterrent to potential criminals. But landscape lighting also makes moving around a property at night safer for residents and guests.

Lighting can be used to illuminate walkways, outdoor living rooms, patios around pools, and other areas where residents and guests will be walking at night, which can reduce the risk of falls and injuries that may result from such spills.

- **ROI:** Savvy homeowners consider a renovation's return on investment before deciding to go forward with a project. Studies vary, but the National Association of Realtors indicates landscape lighting can recoup as much as 70 percent of homeowners' investment in the project at resale. When viewed through the lens of ROI, the cost of installing landscape lighting is even less.



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What to know about kitchen cabinet projects

Kitchens have long been characterized as the busiest room in a home. Kitchens are where meals are prepared and cooked, but they also tend to be gathering spaces where families connect at the end of a day and where guests congregate during holiday celebrations and birthday parties.

All that time in the kitchen makes these popular rooms to renovate. Homeowners who want to give their kitchens a new look and feel without doing a full renovation can consider kitchen cabinet projects. An understanding of kitchen cabinet projects can help homeowners decide if this undertaking is for them.

- Cabinet renovations do not necessarily require replacement. Some cabinets may not need to be removed and replaced.

The renovation experts at HGTV note that kitchen cabinet refacing can be a budget-friendly way to give a new look to cabinets that do not require replacement. Refacing can be as extensive as homeowners prefer, but such projects can create a whole new aesthetic in the kitchen depending on the extent of the project.

- There are many different types of kitchen cabinets. Homeowners who have never been involved in a cabinet project should know they will have many different options to choose from.

Face-frame cabinets are a traditional choice made with a frame around the door and any drawers that might be included as part of the cabinets.

Some additional options include full overlay cabinets, frameless cabinets, recessed panel cabinets, and Shaker cabinets. Homeowners hesitant to choose their own cabinets can work with a

contractor and/or interior designer to find the option that aligns best with their current kitchen.

- Cabinet materials and finishes vary as well. Cabinets can be made from an array of materials, including wood, laminate, metal, and plastic. Cabinets also can be finished with paint, stain, glaze, and lacquer.

Each finish has its own unique characteristics. For example, painted cabinets may need to be tended to with greater frequency than other options because paint can fade. However, painted cabinets remain popular because homeowners can paint them any color at any time.

- Consider the countertops when adjusting kitchen cabinets. Kitchens tend to have color schemes, and that scheme is often reflected in the color of cabinets and countertops.

When tweaking just the cabinets, homeowners should give ample consideration to the overall color scheme of their kitchens. Interior designers can be invaluable resources for homeowners who aren't quite sure how new or refaced cabinets will fit into an overall color scheme.

- Consider replacement if necessary. A kitchen cabinet replacement project will be more expensive than refacing the cabinets. But there are instances when cabinets require replacement.

Excessive wear and tear, insufficient storage, a dated appearance, and cabinets that appear to be sagging off the wall are some indicators that replacement is necessary.

Updated cabinets can give a kitchen a whole new look, even if the cabinets are refaced instead of replaced.

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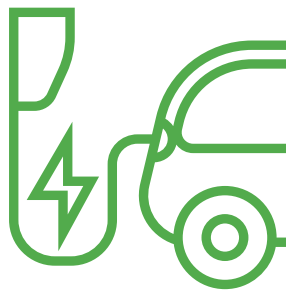


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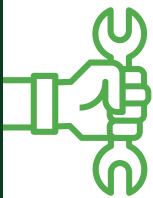
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Pairing the right television with great sound and appropriate lighting can make for a consistently impressive viewing experience.

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Tech upgrades for your home entertainment space

Life in the twenty-first century can feel like it's moving at breakneck speed. Perhaps nowhere is that feeling more pronounced than within the technology sector, where new products are often upstaged by more advanced models, sometimes within a few weeks of an item's initial release.

The speed with which technology advances can make it difficult to keep up. However, it's important to note that software updates can bring devices up to speed in a matter of minutes, often at no cost to users. That can quiet concerns some may have about investing in entertainment room technology. For those ready to move forward with their entertainment room remodel, these tech upgrades can take such spaces to the next level.

• **New television:** Consumers who like to watch television but are not necessarily into what makes certain televisions more suitable to their viewing habits than others may find their heads spinning when they begin their search for a new device. Indeed, the alphabet soup of OLED, QLED, 4K, and other television styles can be difficult to navigate. If confusion reins over your television shopping trips, it might help to identify what you watch most often and then find the type of TV that most suits your viewing habits. Though opinions vary and consumers should always trust

their own eyes, the United Kingdom-based Smart Home Sounds recommends OLED televisions for movie and television lovers as well as gamers who require fast response times. Sports fans may benefit by prioritizing refresh rate when shopping for a new television. Though refresh rate is not the only variable to consider, a faster refresh rate can ensure games don't look fuzzy when the action picks up.

• **Speaker system:** Surround sound can take any entertainment setup to the next level. Modern televisions are slim and that sleek design does not always translate to great built-in sound. Though some recent models feature dramatically improved built-in sound capabilities compared to their slim screen ancestors, a home theater system featuring superior sound is still a must. A home theater surround sound system with subwoofer and Bluetooth connectivity can greatly improve the viewing experience no matter what's on-screen. For consumers working on a tight budget, a soundbar that can be upgraded with additional surround sound speakers down the road can be a great way to slowly build a theater-like sound system in your living room. When purchasing a surround sound system, consumers also can consider speaker stands that hold larger rear speakers in place.

• **Lighting:** Entertainment room lighting can be easy to overlook, particularly when consumers go down the television and sound system rabbit holes. But the right lighting can set the perfect tone in an entertainment room. The decision of which lighting to go with should include consideration of how the space will (or won't) be used when you aren't watching the latest blockbuster or big game. If the room is exclusively for movies or big games, then lighting that calls to mind a movie theater, complete with LED strip lights on the walls, is an option worth considering. If the entertaining space is your living room and a space where you're just as likely to read a book as enjoy a family movie night, then recessed lighting in the ceiling with dimmable bulbs allows you to pivot back and forth between lighting schemes depending on how the room is being used at any given moment.

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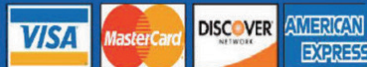


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