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Design tips for remodeling your basement

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A basement remodeling project can add valuable and usable space to a home. For many years, homeowners overlooked the potential of a basement remodel, perhaps thinking it would not be a smart return on investment. But that's no longer the case.

The latest "Cost vs. Value" report from Remodeling magazine says the average basement remodel can cost around \$61,000 with a 70.3 percent recoup rate. In addition, HGTV says architects and contractors indicate the cost of redoing a basement is roughly one-third to one-half less than the price of putting an addition on a home.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Before remodeling a basement, homeowners should think about how they want to use the space. Homeowners also must focus on some potential obstacles in a basement that will need to be addressed so that the area can be as functional as possible.

Basements can be chilly and damp. That means moisture issues and heating and cooling needs must be addressed prior to any construction. Homeowners may have to consider the installation of a dehumidifier and run venting through the basement to allow for proper climate control. If a basement takes on water, either through the walls or a concrete slab, a professional waterproofing

company can come in and fix these issues so they will not damage drywall and flooring afterwards.

The presence of insects and pests also must be addressed. Exterminators can help homeowners figure out which insects are in their basements and how to make the space less hospitable to these unwelcome guests so that the room will become comfortable for human occupants.

Space is often at a premium in basements, which may contain HVAC units, water heaters, filtration devices, ductwork, pipes, and the other appliances. Qualified contractors can suggest solutions for cordoning off appliances and camouflaging pipes and wires so they won't detract from the



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finished product. However, building access panels into the design will make it easier to service or repair features as necessary. Homeowners also may want to wrap pipes before drywall is installed to quiet noisy drainage pipes.

STRUCTURAL ISSUES

Uneven basement flooring will need to be smoothed out and flat-

tened before carpeting or tile can be laid down. A self-leveling underlayment can be applied to fill in gullies, while larger crack and holes will need to be patched.

Once the structure of the basement is addressed, then the design work can begin. Many professionals advise against drop ceilings, which can take away from

ceiling height and look cheap. Basements can be dark, so the addition of plenty of lighting can help brighten the room. Small basement windows can be replaced with larger ones to add more light as well.

Homeowners can mimic built-ins and architectural details from elsewhere in the home so the basement is aesthetically cohesive and doesn't seem like an addition. Bookcases and shelving can add valuable storage space as well. Decorate the basement with bright, neutral colors so they make the space feel more inviting.

With some effort and financial investment, basements can be as beautiful and functional as other rooms in a home.

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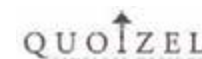
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A homeowner's guide to carpeting choices

Carpet can add warmth and texture to a room and also provide a little bit of soundproofing. Underfoot, carpeting can be more comfortable than other types of flooring, even though it may require more upkeep.

Carpeting insulates rooms in the summer and winter, adding that extra level of protection against the elements. Carpeting also absorbs sound in a home. Many appreciate the warmth and cozy feeling of carpet, especially when stepping out of bed. Carpeting also can increase the level of safety at home. According to the Carpet and Rug Institute, carpeting makes areas of play safer and may also reduce the severity of an

injury in the event of a fall.

Today, there are many different types of carpeting available. Selecting the right carpeting for a room comes down to identifying the level of traffic in a particular room, the attributes homeowners would like the carpet to have and any other needs that fit with their lifestyles. The following guidelines can make carpet shopping a bit easier.

MATERIAL TYPES

There are many different types of carpeting, some suited to certain situations. Here are the four main material components.

Nylon is one of the most durable and stain-resistant carpet fibers available and a popular choice



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among many homeowners.

Polyester carpeting is fashioned to feel and look luxurious.

Olefin is made from polypropylene or polyethylene. It is prized for its strength, resistance to staining and colorfastness. It is often suited well to loop pile or high, dense cut piles.

Wool is durable, albeit less resistant to soiling

than some other materials. However, because it is an all-natural material, it is prized by people who want natural beauty.

TEXTURES

Plush and saxony carpets are better in low-traffic areas. These carpets may show footprints and also vacuum tracks and dirt, but they're higher on the comfort spectrum than other types of

carpet. Berber, which is more flat and dense, helps mask stains and tracks. It is durable in high-traffic areas. Textured carpets like frieze are cut from fibers of different heights, so they mask stains and are also softer on the feet than berber.

PADDING

Padding can impact the way carpeting feels and how long it lasts. It isn't always necessary to purchase the most expensive or thickest padding. However, it is wise to pick a pad that matches the type of carpeting you're selecting and one that aligns with how you plan to use the room. You may be able to go with a thinner pad in low-traffic rooms and beneath dense carpeting like berber. In high-traffic

rooms, choose a thicker, more durable padding. Padding prevents carpet backing and fibers from coming apart over time. It pays to invest in a padding that will last as well.

INSTALLATION

Select a reliable carpet retailer and installer for your business. Competent installers will lay the carpeting in the correct manner so that it will look beautiful and maintain its durability for the life of the product. Shop around to find the right installer or even do the work yourself if you feel capable.

Take time when shopping for carpeting, which is a substantial investment that can last for many years if the right material is chosen and installed correctly.

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What causes roof shingles to curl?

STAR NEWS GROUP

No homeowner wants to look at the exterior of his or her home and see roof damage. Such damage may lead homeowners to think they need a new roof, a potentially costly expense that can quickly throw household budgets into a state of disarray.

The average homeowner spends a little more than \$7,600 installing a new roof. Various factors, including the size of a home and the type of roof homeowners prefer, will affect the cost of a roof replacement. In addition, homeowners who see roof damage can rest assured that not all roof problems will necessarily require a replacement roof to be installed.

Curled shingles are a problem many homeowners have encountered. This particular problem is not always indicative that a roof is on its way out. In fact, one popular home improvement resource notes that, as asphalt shingles age, their corners often begin to curl downward or upward. Homeowners who notice this early enough can glue down the curled section of each shingle that's beginning to curl.

Some shingles may be curling because they're defective. Fortified Roofing, a New Jersey-based roofing company that specializes in the repairing and replacing of various roofing configurations, advises homeowners to contact a local roofing professional to diagnose



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the cause of the curling. Doing so quickly can prevent curled shingles from contributing to more widespread damage.

Moisture and poor ventilation may be contribut-

ing to curled shingles as well. Homeowners with attics in their home may see curled shingles on their roofs because moisture is building up in their poorly ventilated attics. In

addition to causing damage such as curled shingles, a poorly ventilated attic allows moisture to build up, potentially contributing to mold growth. Mold presents a host of

additional problems, including some that can adversely affect the health of a home's inhabitants.

Improper roof installation also may be the culprit behind curled shingles. When a roof is not installed correctly, shingles may not be aligned or nailed down in the right way. This might be what's causing shingles to curl on recently installed roofs.

Curled shingles are unsightly and can pose a significant threat to a home if not addressed promptly. Homeowners can protect themselves and their roofs by working with skilled roofing professionals, who can diagnose issues like curled shingles and offer the right solutions.

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Making some rooms do double-duty

STAR NEWS GROUP

Many homes do not have space for guest rooms, kids' play areas and home theater lounges that are possible in homes with substantial square footage. But they may not be missing out at all.

While large homes remain popular, many people are embracing the benefits of smaller residences. Small homes help homeowners save money, require less maintenance, have smaller environmental impact, and reduce the temptation to accumulate "stuff."

Owners of small homes or apartments can still enjoy the benefits of larger spaces, they just need to equip rooms to perform double duty.

LIVING ROOM / GUEST ROOM

Entertaining guests is easier when there's a dedicated space where visitors can feel at home. When furnishing a liv-

ing room, keep the guest room in mind. A sofa that opens up to a bed or a convertible sectional can be a comfortable place for guests to lay their heads. Side tables provide guests with places to store their belongings, and an empty storage chest can house bed linens or guests' clothing.

DEN / PLAYROOM

Children tend to accumulate toys and games. And as kids grow from children to young adults, their list of must-have items — from video gaming systems to other electronics — grows along with them. Storage can make a room functional for both adults and children. Devote an entire wall to a closet or drawer system where toys can be stored out of sight when necessary. Storage ottomans can be used for extra seating while also providing somewhere for homeowners to stash

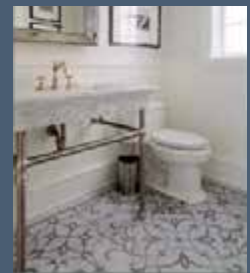
stuffed animals or games for easy access. When choosing furniture, look for fabrics that are resistant to stains and modular pieces that can be moved around as necessary to create room for playing or entertaining.

BEDROOM / HOME OFFICE

In 2015, 24 percent of employed people in the United States did some or all of their work at home, says the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Bringing work home means men and women will need a space to work. In tight quarters, bedrooms may be the only available area. An armoire-style desk will blend in with the decor and can hide paperwork and electronics behind doors. Otherwise, a make-up vanity can serve the dual purpose of providing a place to get ready for a night out and a ready space to house a laptop during the day.

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Exterior renovations that add value to a home

STAR NEWS GROUP

Neglecting a home's exterior can be a disservice to homeowners, particularly those looking to increase the value of their homes. Curb appeal is important, as a home's appearance can greatly affect prospective buyers' perceptions.

Knowing which projects can offer the most bang for their remodeling buck can help homeowners make the right choices when improving the exterior of their homes. The following are some areas where homeowners can direct their focus if their end goal is a great-looking home with added value, as determined by the 2019 "Cost vs. Value Report" from Remodeling magazine. This report compares the average cost of 22 remodeling projects with the value those projects retain at resale across 136 markets.

NEW GARAGE DOORS

Homeowners can recoup 97.5 percent of their investment on a new garage door. This remodel tops the list for good looks and value. The average cost of \$3,611 is for replacing an existing two-car garage.

MANUFACTURED STONE

Replacing a portion of vinyl or wood siding with manufactured stone veneer can greatly improve curb appeal, adding style that can set a home apart. Homeowners can expect to recoup a 94.9 percent return on their investment.

ADDING WOOD DECK

A wooden deck on the rear or side of a home enhances homeowners' ability to enjoy the outdoors year-round. A wood deck addition recoups 75.6 of the cost of homeowners' initial investment.

NEW SIDING

Not only does old or weathered siding look

unsightly, it can impact the energy efficiency of a home. Even though a siding replacement project is costly — at roughly \$16,000 — it offers a 75 percent return and peace of mind that the home is being well-protected from the elements.

NEW ENTRY DOOR

Replacing an existing door with a 20-gauge steel door complete with clear dual-pane half-glass panel, jambs and an aluminum threshold with composite stop gets homeowners 75 percent of their initial investment back at resale. Improving the door isn't all about good looks, either. A door that isn't well-insulated or secure can be problematic.

In addition to these improvements, homeowners would be wise to focus on some upgraded landscaping, an upgraded roof, new windows, and improved exterior lighting as surefire ways to add curb appeal and potential value to their homes.

The right tile can create more hygienic spaces

STAR NEWS GROUP

Tile can be a worthy addition to rooms with potential moisture issues or areas in a home that may routinely necessitate quick cleanup. Because they are not damaged by constant contact with water, tiled floors and walls are often found in bathrooms, kitchens, laundry rooms, and entryways.

Although tile is resilient, it is not impervious to the microorganisms that tend to proliferate in areas where moisture and humidity are commonplace. Microbes can grow rapidly in warm areas, especially if food is present. Mold or mildew issues also can become problematic seemingly overnight. But certain modifications can help homeowners al-

leviate the proliferation of microorganisms.

Various manufacturers have developed their own innovative tile that contributes to cleaner, and sometimes more eco-friendly, home environments. The application of certain treatments can make ceramic tiles even more impervious to water and moisture.

DISEASE-RESISTANCE

Some tile may help reduce the spread of certain strains of bacteria, such as E. coli and staph, without requiring the application of potentially harsh chemical detergents. Others treatments may protect against yeast, molds and fungi that can cause stains and odors and result in the degradation of tile.

Antimicrobial products inhibit the growth



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of microorganisms and suppress their reproduc-

tion. For example, tiles with Microban® protec-

tion employ an antimicrobial agent built into the product during the manufacturing process. When microbes touch the product surface, the agent penetrates the cell wall of the microorganism. Other tiles are treated with micrometric particles of titanium dioxide (TiO₂), which is activated by sunlight or artificial light. This causes a photocatalysis process, which is responsible for the product's antipollution and bactericidal properties. Examples of TiO₂-treated tiles include Active Clean Air & Antibacterial Ceramic™.

Antimicrobial ceramic tile can be advantageous in rooms where sanitation and hygiene are an utmost priority. This includes not only public places, but private residences. Work-

tops and floors where microbes can be transferred are particularly beneficial areas to install antimicrobial tile.

A potential side effect of antimicrobial tile is a reduction in reliance on harsh cleaning products. Although regular washing is recommended, residents may not need to use odoriferous or strong chemical cleaners to sanitize their homes. This helps improve indoor air quality and reduce the potential contamination of the environment from chemical runoff.

Homeowners thinking of installing antimicrobial tile in their homes should discuss their options with a tile retailer or contractor during the planning stages.

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How to keep your pet-friendly home clean

STAR NEWS GROUP

Sixty-eight percent of American households, or about 85 million families, own a pet, according to the 2017-2018 National Pet Owners Survey conducted by the American Pet Products Association. Canada's Pet Wellness report indicates that approximately 35 percent of Canadian households have a dog, while 38 percent have a cat.

Dogs, cats and other companion animals can be wonderful to have around, breathing energy into a family. Despite all of the advantages pets can bring, they tend to be a little messy. However, that doesn't mean it's impossible to have a pet and maintain a clean home. Homeowners just need to

take a few extra steps to help things along.

MANAGE PET FUR

One of the persistent issues pet parents face is fur. Grooming the pet regularly (preferably outdoors) will help tame some of its fur. Covering sofas and other places where pets like to lounge with an old sheet can contain some of the fur where it can be shaken off outdoors and laundered frequently.

UPGRADE YOUR VACUUM

You'll need a vacuum with strong suction to pick up fur, dirt, dander, feathers, birdseed, and any of the other debris that can accumulate thanks to pets. A vacuum with a good brush action



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also can dig in deep to carpets and upholstery to really clean thoroughly, say the experts at House Beautiful.

CLEAN PAWS AT THE DOOR

Pause for paws when pets come back inside.

Keep a small container of water by the front door. When returning from walks, dip the dog's paws into the water and dry before entering the house. This keeps dirt (and salt in the winter) from being a nuisance.

GET THE RIGHT CLEANSER

Pet owners must contend with accidents. Look for an enzymatic cleanser that will treat stains and odors so that pets do not return to the soiled area again and again thinking this is an acceptable potty location, says Modern Dog magazine. Test an area of the carpet or floor being treated for colorfastness before applying. Address accidents promptly.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT UPHOLSTERY

According to Martha Stewart Living, look for top-grain, semi-aniline leathers, as scratches are disguised on such pieces. In terms of fabric, microfiber or microsuede are better suited to pets be-

cause the fabric is tightly woven and may be more resistant to fur and soiling.

LAUNDRY PET ITEMS

Regularly wash bedding and other belongings that pets use. This will help tame indoor odors.

KEEP NAILS NEAT

Clipping dog and cat and other small animals' nails may help avoid scratches on furniture and floors. If you do not feel comfortable doing it, take the animal to a groomer.

Pet owners can keep their homes clean regardless of how much dirt their pets track into the house.

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Fall is the time to winterize your home

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Freezing temperatures may be good for ice skating or building snowmen, but sub-freezing temperatures can be dangerous for the average person and his or her home.

Cold weather often leaves people scurrying to do whatever is necessary to safeguard themselves from the big chill. But it's important homeowners also protect their homes in cold weather.

PLUMBING

Plumbing and pipes may be vulnerable to cold weather. Frozen pipes may burst and cause substantial damage to a home, potentially causing flooding and structural damage.

Homeowners should disconnect and drain

garden hoses before winter arrives. Water to outdoor hose bibs should be turned off, though the valves on these outdoor faucets should be left open to drain. Also, outdoor faucets can be covered with insulating foam covers.

The Red Cross says pipes that freeze most frequently include pipes in unheated areas, such as basements, attics, garages, and crawl spaces. Close vents to the outside in areas like attics and basements to limit the amount of cold air that gets indoors. Think about insulating unheated areas, as well as using pipe sleeves, heat tape or wraps on exposed pipes.

By opening kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors, homeowners can allow



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warm air from a home to reach pipes under the sink. During extreme freezes, keep cold water dripping from a sink to prevent pipes from freezing.

SERVICE HVAC SYSTEMS

It's important to ensure that heating systems are working properly prior to the cold-weather season. It may only take hours for the interior of a home to reach dangerously low

temperatures without adequate heat. Homeowners should schedule annual checkups of furnaces and hot water heaters. Inspect the heat exchanger for cracks, install a clean air filter and make sure all thermostats are working properly.

HAVE FUEL READY

Homeowners who heat their homes with oil, wood or coal should make sure they have plenty of fuel on hand in advance of winter. Shortages can occur, and it may take some time for new fuel to arrive in the midst of a cold snap.

As a precaution, homeowners can rely on portable space heaters to fill in the heating gaps during freezing temperatures. Exercise extreme caution

with these devices, turning them off when leaving the room and remembering to avoid overloading outlets.

PROTECT OUTSIDE

Drain birdbaths, clean out downspouts and remove water from other items where water can freeze and cause damage. Inspect roofing prior to the snowy season, but stay off roofs during freezing weather.

Remove snow shovels and other winter gear from storage and make sure the items are easily accessible during snowstorms.

Winter's bite can be severe. Homeowners can protect themselves and their properties when the freeze sets in.

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Choosing window treatments with purpose in mind

STAR NEWS GROUP

Plantation shutters? Mini-blinds? Cafe curtains? Formal draperies? Homeowners' options in regard to window treatments for their homes are extensive, which can make outfitting home interiors challenging for novice decorators.

Some people do not pay a lot of attention to window treatments, failing to realize just how great an impact the right window treatments can have on a space. According to design experts, window treatments are often an afterthought because residents may not consider them necessities. As a result, homeowners may install whatever is on hand or accept window treatments that came with a house or apartment. But

ignoring window treatments, especially when they can fulfill certain needs, is a missed design opportunity.

One of the first steps to choosing window treatments is determining your end goal. Is privacy your main goal? Are you seeking more natural light in a room? Is there too much light and you need to darken the room? Window treatments can serve multiple functions, and some treatments may make better fits depending on homeowners' ultimate goals.

SEMI-SHEER WINDOW TREATMENTS

Semi-sheer window treatments are often fabric and can help brighten rooms with natural light but offer little privacy.



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They're usually appropriate for spaces where people gather, such as living rooms, dens or dining rooms. Semi-sheer curtains may be paired with another complementary window treatment so

privacy can be customized as needed. For example, sheer curtains let light into a bedroom, but shades can be drawn at night.

MAXIMUM PRIVACY

Bedrooms, work spaces or bathrooms can benefit from extra privacy. While some people may think that privacy comes at the cost of light, that's not always the case.

Functional curtain panels can be drawn closed when privacy is desired and then opened to let in light. The thickness of the fabric will also dictate the amount of privacy the panels create.

Tiers are hung on a short rod-pocket panel and usually cover the lower one-third of a window. They're popular choices

to let light in from the top, but obscure views from the bottom portion of the window.

Cellular shades are another option that provide privacy but still let light in. Cellular shades come in hard and fabric varieties and their use depends on the room. Many cellular shades are constructed with a honeycomb design, offers the design resource Houzz, so they can insulate as well as decorate windows.

BLACKOUT SHADES OR SHUTTERS

Perfect for rooms where babies nap, shift workers rest during daylight hours or external lights, such as that from a street lamp, need to be blocked out, blackout shades do just what their name implies.

A dense fabric lining helps keep light out entirely.

Shutters also can block out light but add to the character of the room. They can be painted a bright color to make a statement or match wall colors to blend in seamlessly.

When selecting window treatments, shoppers can choose retail options or custom treatments. Many designers recommend custom window treatments because they are measured, manufactured and installed specifically for homeowners' windows. However, there are many DIY options available at budget-friendly retailers.

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Using art to enhance your home's decor

STAR NEWS GROUP

Designing a home's interior can be fun. Whether furnishing a first apartment or a newly purchased family home, many people feel that the art they put on the walls of their homes is an expression of their individuality, and that a home isn't truly a home until its

interior reflects their personalities.

Furnishing a home with art can be intimidating, especially for people doing so for the first time. But a few tricks of the trade can help men and women turn the interiors of their homes into spaces that reflect who they are.

EMBRACE YOUR TASTE

Don't hesitate to decorate your walls with art you like. When buying furniture for a home, it can make sense to follow certain rules. For example, parents of young children might want to purchase dark-colored furnishings that can hide stains. But no such rules should govern your choices of artwork. Art reflects

the person who made it, but it also reflects the person who buys it, so buyers should embrace their personal taste when furnishing their homes with art.

SHOP AROUND

Thanks to the internet, billions of pieces of art, from tapestries to photographs to paintings, are at your fingertips. Comparison shopping can be fun and help novices discover their personal tastes. It also can be a great way to support artists. For example, 90 percent of all image royalties on art purchased from one popular online gallery goes directly to the artist, ensuring much of buyers' money is going toward supporting the people responsible for the art they plan to hang in their homes. That can give people a greater sense of pride in their home's decor.

form your decisions when buying art for your home.

SWITCH THINGS UP

Your entire home does not need to follow a theme. If your taste in art is eclectic, embrace that and have different rooms reflect your different tastes. This can give each room its own unique feel and make for a colorful home.

The art people hang in their homes is a personal choice, and the process of finding that art can be fun and eye-opening.

CREATE A GALLERY WALL

Gallery walls, also called moment walls, are one of today's hottest home decor trends. Gallery walls enable homeowners to create visually appealing groupings of photos, frames, wall art, and much more to dress up any room in the house.

or even be your own artwork or photography.

- Experiment with dimensions and levels. Gallery walls need not be restricted to flat photos on a wall. Texture and depth can be used in wall designs. Intersperse shelving, sconces, wooden letters, clocks, and more to make the gallery even more eclectic. Feel free to build the gallery around items that are in the house, such as windows or televisions. This can help electronics blend into the design.

- Establish your focal point. Decorators suggest making the center of the display at eye level, roughly 66 inches off the floor. Then build the gallery out from around that focal point. There are many patterns that can be built into the gallery, from "spiral" to "centered" to "reflection" designs.

- Create a template. Lay the gallery design on the floor and cut newspapers or other paper to the size of each piece. Use masking tape to position these guides on the wall, trying a few arrangements until you are happy with the finished product. Then replace the paper with the artwork.

- Hang items with precision. Don't skimp on technique. Use a ruler, level and the right tools. This ensures pieces are straight and in line with others.

SEEK INSPIRATION

If you're unfamiliar with art, don't hesitate to seek inspiration. Art is everywhere, from the hotels you stay in while traveling to the billboards you pass while driving to work to the local art museum near your home. If you're uncertain of what you like, make a concerted effort to recognize the art you see but may not stop to notice each day. As you expose yourself to more and more art, you will gain a greater knowledge of what you like and dislike. Use that knowledge to in-

Here are some tips:

- Choose a theme. If floral prints are your thing or you love abstract art, build your gallery around these elements. You can even use color or frame style as the coordinating factor.

- Spend time picking out pieces and trying different combinations before you take out the hammer and hardware. The mix should be captivating and look like it was a curated collection. Some pieces can be high-end, while others may be picked up at flea markets

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Must-have kitchen remodeling features

STAR NEWS GROUP

Homeowners looking to renovate often see room for improvement in their kitchens and bathrooms. The National Association of Home Builder's Remodeling Market Index Survey, which measures conditions in the remodeling market, indicates that, in 2015, the two most common remodeling jobs were bathroom remodels [81 percent] and kitchen remodels [79 percent].

A new kitchen remodel for a kitchen measuring 12 by 12 feet may cost homeowners anywhere from \$17,000 to \$37,000. Before investing so much into their remodeling projects, homeowners should think carefully about the features that will improve their time spent at home. When planning a kitchen

renovation, homeowners may want to consider the following upgrades to make the room more enjoyable while improving its functionality.

OVERSIZED SINK

Although high-efficiency dishwashers are popular, deep sinks to soak soup pots or woks are still useful. Deep sinks may be preferable to double sinks, especially for homeowners who use lots of kitchen tools when preparing meals.

SOFT-CLOSING HINGES

When replacing cabinets (or just the hardware), consider installing soft-closing hinges and slides on doors and drawers. These devices eliminate slamming and caught fingers, reducing

noise and injuries in the kitchen.

FOOT PEDAL WATER CONTROLS

When outfitting a sink, think about foot controls, which are popular in doctors' offices and hospitals. Turning on the water with the tap of a foot can reduce the transfer of pathogens to faucets from hands during food preparation. These pedals also free up hands for other tasks.

BOTTOM FREEZER SPACE

People likely spend more time raiding the refrigerator than the freezer on any given day. Rather than having to bend down to seek out that favorite flavor of Greek yogurt, choose a model with the fridge on top and freezer on the bottom, especially



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if anyone in the household has mobility issues. When shopping for refrigerators, French-door style units may offer even more

access, making it easy for homeowners to slide fruit trays, sheet cakes and other large items into the fridge.

EXTRA LIGHTING

A kitchen should be a balance of form and function. A combination of overhead lighting, decorative lighting and task lighting can illuminate all areas of the space effectively.

APPLIANCE STORAGE

Architectural and design resource Houzz says that appliance garages are popular kitchen additions, too. Set at countertop level, these cabinets allow people to keep small appliances plugged in but tucked neatly behind closed doors.

Kitchen remodels are a sizable investment, and renovations can be customized to make the kitchen more hospitable for all in residence.



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Protect wood floors from seasonal damage

Wood floors are a worthwhile investment that can improve the beauty and function of just about any room in a home. Even though wood floors are durable, and new protective treatments help seal out many of the things that may have damaged floors in the past, homeowners still need to prioritize protecting their hardwood floors.

Certain seasons of the year can be more harsh on wood floors than others. For example, seasons characterized by moisture and precipitation, particularly the early spring, winter and fall, can be hard on wood floors. Experts say that cold, snowy days can damage wood floors, and winter temperatures

in general can be harsh on flooring.

Homeowners need not give up on hardwood if they live in an area that sees all four seasons. They just need to take a few steps to keep floors looking beautiful.

CLEAN UP THE SALT

Salt that keeps sidewalks and streets clear of snow and ice inadvertently gets tracked inside a home. Hard chunks of salt can scratch wood floors, and, if left to sit, that salt can eventually cause white marks and other stains. Routinely vacuuming and sweeping up salt is necessary to protect wood floors.

STOW THOSE SHOES

Invest in shoe storage. Wet or snowy boots can



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create puddles around the house. Have a special mat or tray by the front door where wet shoes can be kept. A nice bench in the entryway makes it easy for residents and guests

to remove their shoes until it's time to go back outside.

USE THE RIGHT MATS

Use water-wicking mats. Homeowners will

probably need a few extra mats around to tame errant drips and wipe shoes. Any entrance that might be used by people or pets should be protected. Try to avoid petroleum-based, rubber-backed mats, as they could discolor the wood floor.

CONTROL INDOOR HUMIDITY

Cold, dry air in a home can be problematic because the moisture in the wood can eventually evaporate into the air. The heat will suck that moisture from the flooring, causing it to shrink, creak and splinter and become more brittle. Think about investing in an in-line humidifier for the home's HVAC system that can keep a moderate amount of humidity in the home. Hardwood floorboards

are installed to accommodate minor temperature and humidity fluctuations. This is typically a range of between 60 and 80 degrees F with a relative humidity range of 35 to 55 percent, advises ServiceMaster.

CLEAN CORRECTLY

Use the right cleaning products. Avoid excessive water to clean wood floors, and select soaps that are specially designed for wood flooring. Consult with the flooring manufacturer for a list of detergents that are safe to use.

With proper care, hardwood flooring can survive rain, snow and cold weather.



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Soundproofing tips as you spend more time indoors

STAR NEWS GROUP

As the weather gets colder, Americans inevitably spend more time indoors. If you're sharing a space with an excitable toddler, an aspiring rock musician or a TV enthusiast with a penchant for loud volumes, peace and quiet may seem increasingly elusive.

Try these simple soundproofing tips to restore or create a more tranquil atmosphere in your home:

1. Hush noisy appliances. Make sure your appliances are working smoothly. Unusual rattles, clanks or vibrations may mean it's time for a repair. When a replacement is needed, seek out a quieter machine. New technologies have allowed

manufacturers to lower the sound output of many models.

2. Seal sound leaks. Holes and cracks around windows and doors let outside noise into the home. Weather-stripping and/or caulking can help to eliminate the intrusion of exterior noise. Adhesive soundproofing tape can also help seal any problem areas.

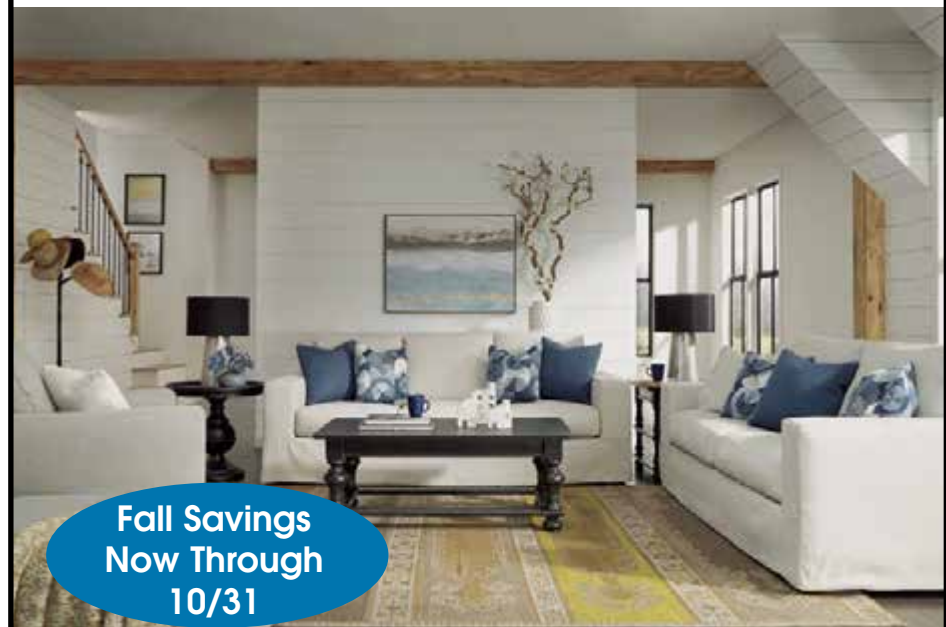
3. Anticipate centers of noise when renovating. When designing a new room or renovating an existing one, consider its intended use and potential for generating noise. Playrooms, music studios or home theaters, for example, can be quieted with insulation. Look for a products specifically de-

signed to provide superior sound absorption and that can be applied to the interior walls of a noisy room to effectively reduce disruptive sounds.

4. Use sound-absorbent materials. Carpets and window drapes prevent sound from echoing around a room. If your home has hardwood, laminate flooring or tile, consider investing in a throw rug to reduce ambient noise and add some character to your space.

Taking simple steps to create a more peaceful space will maximize the enjoyment of your home. It can also have the added benefit of helping to keep the peace among spouses, parents and siblings alike.

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Prevent mold and mildew when weather turns colder

STAR NEWS GROUP

Mold and mildew are not only unsightly, but unhealthy. These fungi grow readily in damp areas and are found in the air breathed both indoors and outside. If left unaddressed, mold and mildew can threaten the health of a home's inhabitants.

Mildew is a type of mold that remains relatively flush with the surface it grows on. Other molds can grow puffy in appearance. Molds serve the purpose of destroying organic materials, but in high amounts, these microorganisms can cause respiratory problems, sinus congestion, throat irritation, headaches, and other issues, particularly when mold grows

unchecked indoors. As a result, it is essential to address mold before it becomes problematic.

The wet season in winter is when molds often grow and expand. Mold can break down the integrity and strength of the surfaces where it grows.

THE RIGHT STRATEGIES

Homeowners can employ the following strategies to prevent mold growth.

- Keep all surfaces clean, using proper cleaning products. Diluted bleach solutions are highly effective at killing microscopic fungi, viruses and bacteria.
- Reduce moisture and humidity by ensuring sufficient air circulation in rooms, particularly bath-

rooms and kitchens. An exhaust fan will help remove moisture quickly.

- Fabrics covered in mildew that can be laundered should be carefully removed and washed in chlorine bleach and hot water. An oxygen bleach product also can be effective.

- Invest in a dehumidifier that can reduce moisture in the home in problem areas, such as damp basements or garages.

- Fix plumbing leaks as soon as possible.

- Remove damp leaves and snow from areas around the foundation of the home. Ensure that gutters and downspouts

SEE **MOLD** PAGE 21



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Ways to clear that entryway clutter

STAR NEWS GROUP

The entryway to a home is the first thing guests experience when coming inside. It also can be the first place residents drop their belongings after long days at school or work. As a result, entryways can quickly be consumed by clutter. Taming such messes takes a mixture of ingenuity and planning.

Homeowners hoping to clear their entryways of clutter must first decide what they want to get out of the space. Will it simply be a decorative spot

with photos and other home decor on display? Or is functionality the primary goal?

Once that decision has been made, take inventory of which items, such as shoes, keys, umbrellas or coats, need to be in the area, which don't [i.e., old mail]. To make things more organized, rearrange the former while removing the latter.

Next it is time to assess storage needs and what's already available. User-friendly storage items may need to be purchased to make the room as func-

tional as possible. The following ideas also can help bring order to the space.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Create a command center. Create a central location where items are neat, orderly and within reach. Use a bulletin board, dry-erase calendar or something that can house schedules and important notices. Hooks

can hold keys, chargers and more.

- Keep it covered. Covered bins can serve as a seating area and also a place to store shoes, hats and scarves.

- Create cabinet space. Store items in cabinets so they are organized but out of sight. This way belongings are not just left on an entryway table.

- Create another drop zone. If the entryway is too small to serve its purpose, outfit another room or area that also can do the job. This can be a laundry room or mudroom area. Install shelves, a bench, cabinets and hooks. Just be sure this space is close enough to the entryway to make it useful.

- Go vertical. An easy way to keep things neater

is to remove items from the floor and embrace vertical storage. Shoe racks, hooks for purses and a cabinet for coats may do the trick.

Clutter can accumulate in entryways. But some simple adjustments can quickly revamp the space to make it neater and much more functional.

Ways to prevent mold and mildew

MOLD

FROM PAGE 20

are clear of debris and can shuttle water away from the house effectively.

- Replace cracked or defective mortar in basements.

- Make sure all seals on windows and doors are not compromised and are in good working condition.

- Be sure an HVAC inline humidifier is adjusted

to the right setting and isn't pumping too much moisture into the heated air; otherwise, the added humidity can contribute to mold.

- If there is a flood or water infiltrates a home in other ways, hire a professional service to help clean and dry the home effectively.

Mold and mildew are problematic, but with diligence they can be kept at bay.



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Easy ways to clean up those leaves

STAR NEWS GROUP

Autumn is marked by colorful foliage and plummeting temperatures. Once those leaves reach peak color, they fall from the branches and collect on lawns, necessitating cleanup projects. For homeowners with big yards, such a project can be tiring and time-consuming. However, there

are ways to make leaf cleanup easier.

One of the easiest ways to clean up leaves is to reach for a lawn mower rather than a rake. The mower will cut leaves down to smaller sizes, creating an effective mulch that can add nutrients back into the lawn. Davey, a lawn and landscape solutions service, says that

mowed leaves also can be collected in a mower bag and added to garden beds or compost piles.

For those who prefer manual raking, select a rake with tines that will not skewer the leaves in the process. Big rakes also can make faster work of gathering leaves into piles.

The home improvement resource The Family

Handyman advocates for the use of a lawn sweeper. This is a manual device that has a rotating sweeping brush that gathers up lawn debris and leaves into an attached hopper bag. Like mowed leaves, the bag can be emptied into a compost pile or distributed where needed.

Raking leaves onto a large tarp is another option. Once it's full, the tarp can be taken to the curb where many towns will collect the leaves seasonally. Otherwise, the tarp can be used as a funnel to put leaves into a gardening bag or another appropriate receptacle.

Leaf blowers remain a fast option for cleaning up yards, but they require electricity or gas and can be noisy. Still, they are a popular choice for large

landscapes or when quick work needs to be made of leaf clean-up.

USES FOR FALLEN LEAVES

Not all of those leaves need to be carted away. In fact, there are several different uses of leaves that can be beneficial.

1. Spread leaves as a protective mulch to cover tender perennials or root crops/bulbs in the ground. The leaves will form a natural insulating cover that keeps the soil and the plants within a bit warmer over winter.

2. Create a pile of leaves that will break down and form a crumbly, compost-like material called leaf mold. Even though leaf mold may sound like a blight, it's actually a good amendment to garden soil, improving its structure and ability to hold water. Leaf mold also attracts beneficial organisms that are vital in healthy soil.

3. Brown leaves can be added to green materials in compost piles to improve the health of the compost being formed. According to the healthy living resource Care2, the ideal ratio is 75 percent brown to 25 percent green materials in compost. Turn compost piles regularly to aerate them.

4. Store dried, mulched leaves in a dry spot so they can be used in the spring as a weed barrier for spring plantings. They will keep weeds at bay and help retain soil moisture to ensure small sprouts have the resources to grow.

5. Use shredded leaves as a lawn supplement. Pass a lawn mower over leaves left on the lawn to break them down into pieces too small to rake. This will help keep the lawn healthy throughout the winter without blocking out needed sunlight.



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Photo spreads in home design magazines can be awe-inspiring. Quite often homeowners wish they could lift the looks right off the pages of magazines and transform their own homes into picture-perfect retreats.

It takes an eye for design to pull a room together — even with inspiration — and make it both functional and attractive. While hiring an interior designer is one way to go, homeowners can use some of the tricks and techniques the designers employ to do a remarkably good job of improving the interiors of their homes without such help.

EMBRACE TEXTURE

The colors used in a home can add impact, but designers often utilize

various textures to create aesthetic appeal. A single color scheme can be enhanced by various fabrics. Consider a leather sofa made more cozy with chenille pillows next to a rustic side table. Figure out ways to incorporate a few different textures to add depth to the room.

TAKE CARE WITH COLOR

Many high-end homes showcase neutral shades that are enhanced by pops of color. If you like a rich, royal purple, leave room for other colors as well. Add touches of purple in vases, throw pillows and other accessories.

Also, many designers work in shades of three for room colors. There may be one main color for walls, another color for larger accents, such as couches and chairs, and



COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

then a third color that pops in accessories such as flowers, pillows and collectibles. These can be any colors, but the most muted tends to be the more abundant shade.

ADD A BIT OF BLING

Glittery items and metallics can add a touch of luxury feel to any space. A shiny table lamp, mirrors, a sparkling chandelier, and the like are easy ways to produce a high-end feel. Reflective surfaces also will cast light around the room, giving the illusion of a larger space.

MAKE A STATEMENT

Choose a big statement piece. Many homeowners make the mistake of filling a room with several small pieces of furniture that only contribute to clutter. Instead, look for

a statement piece, which can be a cabinet, armoire or chaise. Mix and match large and small elements for a sense of balance.

ACCESSORIZE

Finish the room with accessories and flowers. When placing and hanging knickknacks and wall art, odd-numbered groupings often look the most cohesive and interesting. Experiment with different scales and heights for even more dimension.

When inspiration hits, take some cues from interior design pros to make spaces look like they belong on the pages of your favorite magazines. tion goes here and here and here. Caption goes here and here and here.

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