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Volume 23, Issue 8

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Expert guidance to find the perfect stone products for your next project *page 19*



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Hard Choices

A closer look at the latest trends in stone and tile

Perfect Pools

The bells and whistles that will enhance your swimming experience

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Blue Ridge Furniture

Creating quality custom home furnishings *page 23*

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Imperial Marble & Granite

Providing dedicated customer service and exclusive products to more Pennsylvania homeowners *page 21*

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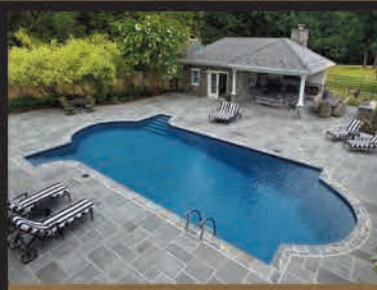
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HARD CHOICES



When it comes to choosing the right **stone for your project,** experts can help you navigate the many options.

By Carly Murray

CUSTOMIZED STONE RENOVATIONS AND ADDITIONS DO NOT HAVE TO COME AT THE EXTRA EXPENSE OF STRESS. With the plethora of options available in design and functionality, the most difficult step can be deciding what works best for the consumer's ideal space and lifestyle. However, local design experts are there to help from the beginning of template creation to the finished product.

Choosing the right style

This year, complements of blue and green are trending in kitchens and bathrooms to add a pop of color. For instance, blue or green cabinets or backsplash can be brought out by a material with patterns or textures that match. In contrast, natural choices like soapstone and granite can achieve a more traditional and classic look. Ultimately, it comes down to individual taste, and what fits with the ideal finished product.

"Whether someone is looking for colorful granite from Brazil, white marble from Italy, or white, gray or gold quartz countertops, we have something for everyone," says Kristine Kzelian, a sales representative and designer at Imperial Marble & Granite.

Online visualizers can assist in planning, and serve as tools for determining a color palette while experimenting with elements such as countertops, backsplash, floors



HARD CHOICES

and cabinets. That way, remodels don't have to be a risk—and the result doesn't have to be a surprise.

"Since we sell only quality cabinetry and countertops, any materials from inexpensive to expensive that customers select will be durable and attractive. While customers selecting the most expensive custom cabinetry we carry can be startlingly beautiful, the greatest impact making a kitchen renovation valuable is always the design first and the materials second," says Paul McAlary, president of Main Line Kitchen Design.

What's more, stone installation isn't limited to a bathroom or a kitchen, and can be a charming addition to outdoor bars, fireplaces and laundry rooms.

"We have state-of-the-art machinery that allows us to create intricate fireplace surrounds and mitered countertops," says Dino Vogia, president of Stone Tech Fabrication.





Choosing the right functionality

Design professionals can recommend materials to match visual and practical preferences. While quartz countertops remain the most popular choice in material, quartzite is gaining traction for its natural patterns and colors. No matter the preference, every material has its own set of advantages that, when combined with a favored visual aesthetic, can create the best possible result.

"Quartzite is a material that can kind of give you the same aesthetic look of a marble and that kind of soft pattern, but it has the density and durability that lends itself more towards granite. So it's kind of one of those materials that's the best of both worlds," says Mike Werner, sales manager at AAA Hellenic Marble.

As each individual is different, so is each material. Granite kitchen countertops are known to be great for people who like to cook because of their durability and heat resistance. Quartz, however, is easy to clean, and won't stain from oils or spices. And for a household with children, quartz can be favored because of its resistance to spills.

"Granite and quartzite are very popular choices for countertops due to their durability. Like all natural stones, they have to be sealed to prevent stains, which is always done by our team. Natural stones should be resealed once a year to make sure stone is protected from stains. Since quartz [countertops] are man-made materials, they do not require sealing. They are ideal for homeowners with busy lifestyles," says Vogia.

Each material has its own advantages, and there are always solutions to any potential issues. Ultimately, it's about proper research and education provided by professionals.

"Within design, educating clients is extremely important. They may find a product that they absolutely love, but if you don't have the experience to say, 'This product will fail or deteriorate or discolor or have an adverse reaction due to heat' … and then a year later it looks awful, you just killed the job. I always urge any person looking to do a kitchen or bath to seek out a true experienced individual that has been either accredited, or has been in the industry for a period of time and actually is familiar with installations," says David Cerami, president of HomeTech Renovations.

Choosing the best for each budget

Just because a preferred material may not be within one's budget, it does not mean that their dream kitchen or bathroom is no longer obtainable. With all of the choices available, there are always alternatives that are more beneficial toward each individual's lifestyle. Aside from materials, pricing will depend on the level of customization. "The investment that many people don't make to get a great kitchen is often not money, but their own time," says McAlary. He also advises that the key to smooth kitchen renovation is to "plan, plan and plan some more." Part of planning and budgeting is to figure out exact measurements so there aren't extra charges for excess material.

"We have a couple of suppliers that we've been dealing with for a couple of decades [and] we have a great relationship with them. They give us great pricing and great availability, so we have a whole list of colors that we get a square foot pricing on, as opposed to the requirement of buying a whole slab," says Lorraine Farkas at Sterl Kitchens.

Pricing can also depend on the source of the material, its appearance and its rarity. Quartz, for instance, can differ in cost for attributes like pattern and color. This is where options come in handy yet again, with local, national and international stones that vary in visual effect and lifestyle practicality. "If a stone's coming from halfway around the world—from Madagascar—that's going to be more pricey than something mined in Vermont," says Cerami.

Design experts can often help to recommend similar alternatives that achieve the same look and feel without causing the price of a project to skyrocket.

Choosing everything else

While in a home renovation mindset, additional services and products can be both tempting and seem like an extra hassle, especially if the project is "do-it-yourself." However, several businesses offer either recommendations or in-store products to further streamline the process.

Top image courtesy of Sterl Kitchens. Image below courtesy of AAA Hellenic Marble

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"Usually if there's a general contractor involved, they have the ability to have everything coordinated through that person. If they don't have that luxury, then we can help assist with plumbing services, removal and disposal of the countertops," says Werner.

It's also about knowing what products work together, and which do not.

"We also have sinks, so when they are getting their countertop, they can get their sink and their faucet. …Sometimes people don't realize they need to get a new sink just because they're getting a quartz or granite countertop, and they say, ' I have a sink already.' But it was a drop-in sink for Formica. They'll need to get an undermount sink to use with granite or quartz," says Farkas.

Compared to the limited options available in the recent past, stone renovations have been greatly innovated in the last decade. It may seem daunting to begin a room renovation, but the wide variety of both products and design experts can turn an idea into a reality. And for customers who prefer to be as "hands-on" as possible, there are stone fabricators that will allow a customer to make specific decisions every step of the way.

"Most clients have a vision for their remodel and our sales representatives offer our services to find the right countertop to bring our client's vision to life. When choosing Imperial for countertop services, we request clients to be present at both the field measurement and installation in the event questions arise from our technicians and to sign off at the time of our services," says Kzelian.

So whether you're ready to renovate the kitchen, add some modern elements to a bathroom or beyond, there's no shortage of stone and industry experts to help you create a functional space with tremendous aesthetic appeal based on your style, preference and budget. H&H

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ask the expert by Liz Hunter

AAA Hellenic

STONE MATERIALS ARE ESSENTIALLY THE ICING OF ANY KITCHEN OR BATHROOM PROJECT, PROVIDING BOTH THE FUNCTIONAL VALUE OF PULLING THE ROOM'S COMPONENTS TOGETHER AND SOMETHING PLEASING FOR THE EYE.

Choosing the perfect stone takes careful consideration, and the guidance of someone who knows the product. At AAA Hellenic, customers can turn to professionals who have decades of experience designing and installing stone in kitchens, bathrooms, foyers, fireplaces and even in outdoor living spaces. Mike Werner, sales manager, is one such expert who has been with the family-focused company for more than 10 years.

House & Home spoke with Werner about how new products from Silestone and Dekton are giving people the high-end looks they've wanted at a more reasonable price.


Mike Werner, sales manager

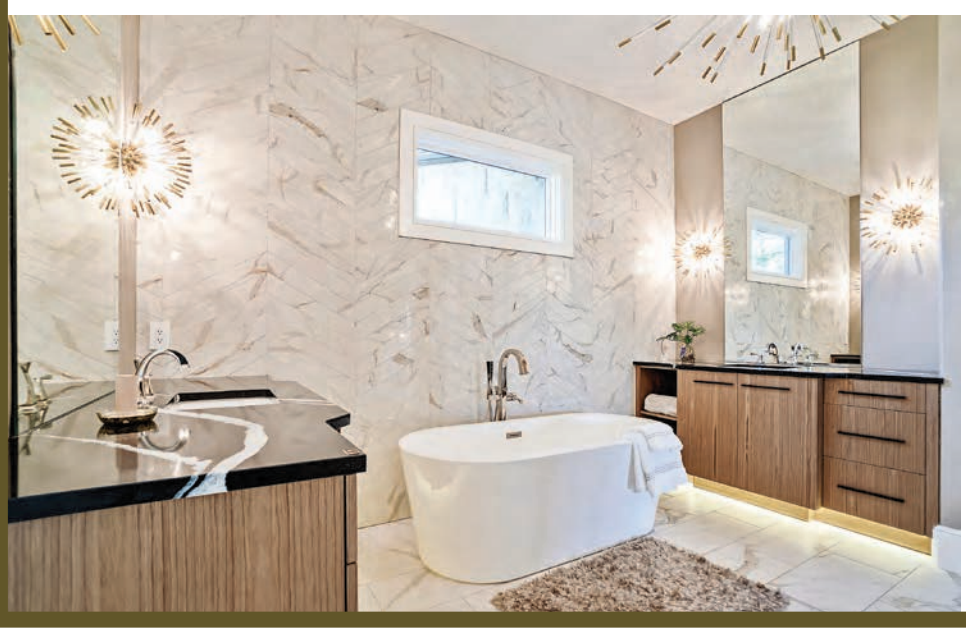
WHEN YOU MEET WITH CLIENTS, WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THEIR LIFESTYLE TO GUIDE THEIR SELECTION?

Most individuals typically have saved pictures they found online or in magazines to establish an idea of their design preferences. We also want to know about what's going on in the space where the stone will be used. Every household is different. Materials they might like or find attractive might not be the best choice for their home. Granite is very dense and durable. It is heat resistant and scratch resistant, with minimal maintenance. Marble is a classic choice with unrivaled beauty and gives you a timeless look. It may be a little softer than granite, but will still give you a very durable surface.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE EMERGING POPULARITY OF NATURAL STONE QUARTZITE AND YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF IT?

Engineered quartz has gained popularity over the past couple of years, but natural stone is still the most requested for its beauty and durability. Natural stone quartzite is an especially good choice for kitchens. Everyone likes the look of marble, but it's softer and more porous. Quartzite is a dense stone that can handle the impact and functionality in a kitchen, and it's not as porous.

We directly import this stone from the quarries to our facility, which enables us to pass discounted pricing on to clients for rare quartzites in a wide variety of colors. The materials are temperamental and require a high level of care and precision, which Hellenic excels and specializes in.



WHAT ARE THE NEWEST MATERIALS ON THE MARKET AND WHERE ARE THEY BEST USED IN THE HOME?

We're really excited about the design potential with products from Silestone and Dekton in shower wall and bathroom applications. People have been longing for a solid-slab, seamless look on their shower walls—nobody likes grout joints—but this comes with additional labor to get these large slabs into tight shower spaces. These new products are more durable and thinner, making them easier to transport and install. Silestone is engineered quartz and in particular has some nice combinations of natural stone-looking materials, as well as muted patterns for the monochromatic look people want. Dekton is a porcelain and glass hybrid with quartz that is more durable and still gives that desirable natural stone look. This is something that we are specializing in.

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Our inventory of marble, granite, soapstone and quartzite is very strong right now, we've added a lot of new products for people. We have about 200 different colors on display, and our stones are directly imported from places like Italy, Brazil and Africa. It's always beneficial to walk through and see the stone in different lighting, and more often than not, people find something they never expected. H&H


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Just a Stone's Throw Away

Debuting a West Chester showroom earlier this year has helped **Imperial Marble & Granite** bring its dedicated customer service and exclusive products to even more Pennsylvania homeowners. *by* **Madeleine Maccar**

Imperial Marble & Granite

Main location: 200 Old Tinicum Island Road, H Complex, Essington, Pa. (610) 521-0130

Showroom: 1311 West Chester Pike, West Chester, Pa. (610) 738-5277 | **IMGStone.net**

Since 2004, Imperial Marble & Granite has been working with clients from all over eastern Pennsylvania to design, fabricate and install uniquely stunning natural stone and quartz furnishings, from residential kitchens and bathrooms to retail establishments' reception spaces and dining areas.

But owner Albert Kzelian noticed a worrisome decline in clients from Exton, Malvern, King of Prussia, West Chester and other areas for whom Imperial's Essington location was just a little too far away.

So, just like with every job Imperial puts its name on, Kzelian came up with a solution that prioritizes his customers' needs: establishing a showroom closer to them.

"I said, 'OK, if you guys don't want to come to us, we'll come to you,'" he begins. "An opportunity came up at this location in West Chester and I could not resist. We built a 4,000-square-foot, beautiful showroom, and it's right on West Chester Pike."

The result was a wide-open, thoughtfully designed space. Open since April, that West Chester showroom is already a resoundingly well-received success.

One of the most striking features of the Imperial showroom is that there are no tiny samples trying to approximate the full extent of all the colors and natural beauty that exist in one piece of marble or granite: The entire slab is available for client scrutiny, which Kzelian says is crucial in helping them fully assess a stone they're considering for their home.

"The sample certainly doesn't justify what the slab looks like," he explains. "The slabs have so many variations that a sample that's just six or 12 inches isn't going to tell you about the entire piece because that piece has gold, gray, white, beige, all these different colors that a sample can't show you. So when the customer sees the whole entire piece, they're like, 'Oh my God, this is beautiful!' or 'Wow, this is not what I was expecting, it's too busy.'"

But the showroom, Kzelian points out, "is not just for countertops." It's also where you can find an array of ceramic and marble tile, vanities, faucets and sinks, knobs, kitchen cabinetry, lighting and even sound systems outsources appliances so "we can give everything to the customer looking for a complete kitchen."

"We have a variety of different things," Kzelian says. "A homeowner could come in and purchase pretty much everything for every room all at once."

The Imperial team stays on top of current trends and client-demographic preferences—Kzelian notes that customers under 40 tend to gravitate to the manmade quartz but those 40 and older still prefer more natural stone like granite and marble, while neutral colors are staging a comeback in demand across the board—that guide their offerings.

And for much of those in-stock options, Kzelian adds that Imperial is the only place in the state where they can be purchased. "There are specific products or colors that we're the exclusive dealers of in Pennsylvania. Nobody else carries them or has them."

While the West Chester showroom gives clients a chance to get an up-close, hands-on look at all the pieces Imperial has in stock, one of the biggest advantages to them is the cost savings that comes with making a purchase directly with Imperial.

But what really differentiates Imperial from the rest is the kind of dedicated, attentive client support that drove Kzelian to open up a showroom to better assist his customers in the first place.

"Customer service is No. 1, No. 2 is craftsmanship and No.3—which is the most important thing—is turnaround," he says. "From template to install, it's a 10-day turnaround.We have the technology and machinery to back us up. Everything is done by digital measurements and laser measurements, so that helps us make things more precise and accurate."



It is that determination to deliver high-quality, skilled and minimally intrusive work to clients that Kzelian believes will ensure that Imperial keeps growing so it can keep finding new ways to ensure all their clients' needs are met.

"We started out in 2004 with six employees and now have 43," says Kzelian. "Our second location is helping us to continue helping clients with a warehouse experience that has all the beautiful lights and design of a showroom." H&H

Nina Lea Photography



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Handcrafted Comfort

The team of woodworkers at **Blue Ridge Furniture** takes pride in every piece of custom, hand-made home furnishings it creates.

by **Madeleine Maccar**

As any loyal customer of Blue Ridge Furniture can attest to, there's nothing like the durability and beauty of solid-wood furniture made by hand, especially when it's a skill passed down from generation to generation.

And Sidney Burkholder, who started building Blue Ridge's custom-made furnishings in 1994, is inclined to agree.

"We're still making furniture just like we did in the old days," he affirms. "Indoor furniture is our main business, and every piece is solid wood—we use no veneers."

After Burkholder joined the Blue Ridge team and worked his way up to a management role, he seized the opportunity to buy the business in the early 2000s. In those two decades, three of Burkholder's children have become involved in company operations, as his oldest sons Leonard, Lamar and Nathan lend their carpentry craftsmanship to the manufacturing side.

Its physical footprint has expanded, too. A "big expansion" in 2004 led to the creation of a building where the team does all of its finishing and hardware assembly, and an increasingly spacious showroom and retail store about two miles from its manufacturing facility allows customers to examine the fine craftsmanship behind all of Blue Ridge's handmade furnishing up close.

"In 2006, we expanded to an around 3,000-square-foot showroom, and then in 2010, we moved farther east on the same road up into 11,000 square feet," Burkholder explains.

In 2010, Blue Ridge also started selling an array of outdoor furniture, which is also available at its Narvon, Pennsylvania, showroom, though those furnishings are supplied by outside vendors rather than the interior-focused, in-house craftsmen. Those pieces come with the same promise of providing long-lasting beauty and comfort, backed by 20-year warranties.

"We thought [outdoor furniture] would be a good supplement to our business and our name, so of course we looked all over for the best quality," says Burkholder. "We have three vendors we currently deal with right now, the top vendors we believe are out there."

But even though Blue Ridge has seen some changes over the years, its commitment to delivering fine wooden furniture has always remained the same, as has its focus on creating one-of-a-kind indoor pieces for buyers from New York City to Baltimore and all around the world. Every item that Blue Ridge makes and sells—which includes tables, gliding rockers, beds, hutches, office furniture and even some bathroom amenities, as well as the raw pieces it finishes—is solid wood. And whether that piece is made from oak, cherry, walnut or maple, it's guaranteed to last for decades, if not generations.

Blue Ridge also offers live-edge tables, which preserve a piece of wood's natural curves, gnarls and character rather than cutting it in straight edges—a trend that Burkholder's son Leonard expressed interest in years before it became one of today's most in-demand pieces.

"The live edge is something my oldest son got into here a couple of years ago, and it's been a slow-growing business that, so far, has done very well for us," Burkholder says before adding with a chuckle that "what we used to think was firewood 20 years ago, people are now thinking of as nice furniture."

No matter what a customer is looking for, though, creating high-quality custom pieces is a process that Blue Ridge has down to a science, inviting client feedback and offering transparency from the very first stage of putting pen to paper.

"People come in with a picture or a drawing, we go over it with them and add details here and there, and then give them a rendered drawing of it and have them approve it before we proceed with the work—and then, of course, there's different finishes you can use, you can match up the stain colors if you want pieces to go together," explains Burkholder. "We work with our customers all the way from start to finish. The advantage we have over other stores is that we are the manufacturer."

With Blue Ridge becoming more and more of a family affair as even Burkholder's youngest son and daughter have taken to tinkering around the shop, he knows the woodworking craftsmanship he learned in his youth and is passing along to his children will keep the business's reputation as strong and long-lasting as the pieces it makes and sells.

"I enjoy making people happy and delivering the furniture that they say is absolutely gorgeous, is beautiful, it fits their decor," says the Blue Ridge owner. "Hearing 'You're the best!' is exactly what we're looking for." H&H

Blue Ridge Furniture
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CHRISSY LYNCH

Operations Manager
Wm. Henderson Heating, Cooling, Plumbing & Electrical Services

How long have you been in this industry?
Sixteen years.

Did you have another career before this one?
I was in the banking industry.

What about this industry appealed to you?
The nonstop flow and demand of a service that changes day to day, all year-round. Having the ability to provide solutions that help members in our local communities improve their homes' comfort, efficiencies and utility cost savings—which impact their daily lives through the work our team offers in residential heating, cooling, plumbing and electrical services—has been an exciting experience.

What did you find most challenging as you worked your way up in the industry?
Working my way through a male-dominated industry, while gaining the respect of my peers and clients. Breaking the barrier of what was perceived to be a specific mold of this blue-collar trade. I am proud to be a strong female leader and work to encourage other women to lean into the trades industry. Opportunities are plentiful and it can be an incredibly rewarding career path.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?
My mom, where I get my strong work ethic, dedication, commitment, love and strength. These are what drive me as I continue to work toward progress and growth.

What is the most rewarding thing about what you do?
Having the ability to support my team and encouraging them to think outside of the box. Watching them grow into confident individuals that can provide 100% customer satisfaction through outstanding service to our client base is what I find most satisfying in my work.

What are the most important habits for business success?
Having clear communication and building trust in our teams is crucial to our operational success.

What is something you can't live without?
Purpose and passion. I have always kept these with me throughout my career and in my personal life. Having a purpose to inspire, to push and to drive forward while keeping a focus on passion is what allows me to be a confident, strong and compassionate support system for my team, my clients and my family.

How do you unwind after a stressful day?
I have a clear goal that leads each day. My daily focus is aligned to "run the day" and not to let the "day run you." As we all know, there are times that we have a domino effect and wonder how that day slipped away and created such stress and chaos. By the end of the day, I reflect on what could have been done differently, what process needs to be improved and how I can turn it around tomorrow. Of course, this is all done with a nice glass of wine and sitting on a rocking chair on my front porch with my daughter. She and I speak openly about both of our days and what we learned from them and how we are going to make tomorrow an even better day. **H&H**



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LADIES WHO LEAD *Spotlight:*

KAREN STALKER



Karen Stalker, General Manager, Gas Works Inc.

How long have you been in this industry?
I have been in the business since 1997, but have been exposed to it for most of my life as it's my father's business. I thought I would come work for him part-time when my daughter was born—that didn't last very long and I was here full-time!

Did you have another career before this one?
Yes. Upon graduation from college I worked in the computer and telecommunication business for about 15 years.

What about this industry appealed to you?
This being my father's business, it was always in my life and I started doing clerical work for about 10 years. My father is a firm believer that all parts of the job are to be experienced—no nepotism here! I liked the thought of working with clients to make their dreams a reality in their homes. It is an interesting and ever-changing business and since it involves fire in someone's home, I am very careful with products and making sure we would have it in our own home safely and not just to sell.

What did you find most challenging as you worked your way up in the industry?
The fireplace and barbecue shops have been traditionally all male. Working through and partnering with my distributors and manufacturer reps has been challenging and very rewarding at the same time. Very quickly you can realize who is going to partner with you and who is not.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?
I would say my father, who has been in the industry for 50 years and has been quite successful. It's been challenging at times but I wouldn't trade it for anything! A close second would be my sister, who started her own business.

What is the most rewarding thing about what you do?
I would say helping people plan their fireplace or barbecue project. Discussing what their wants and needs are and seeing how happy they are with the end result.

What are the most important habits for business success?
I would say organization and honesty. Organization to stay on top of jobs and honesty so the customer's expectations and ideas are met because sometimes what is seen on TV is not necessarily reality!

What is something you can't live without?
My dogs and my family ... and my breaks to Disney!

How do you unwind after a stressful day?
Go home and relax with my family and dogs.

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LADIES WHO LEAD *Spotlight:*

JANICE MOTWANI



Janice Motwani,
Head of Sales,
Lead Designer, Co-Owner
Home Lighting of Frazer

How long have you been in this industry?
I have been in this industry for over 30 years, and each year has been an illuminating journey of growth, learning, and passion for lighting. It's been a fantastic adventure, and I am grateful for the opportunities and experiences given to me by my wonderful customers.

Did you have another career before this one?
One of my first roles after migrating to the U.S. was as a social worker in N.J., serving the underprivileged community. This experience has greatly influenced my success in business and sales. As a social worker, I developed strong communication skills, active listening abilities and cultural sensitivity, which are vital in sales. Additionally, the problem-solving and resilience gained from social work have helped me overcome challenges and find innovative solutions in business. Additionally, my degree in psychology has helped me understand human behavior and connect with clients on a deeper level. Overall, my diverse experiences have provided a solid foundation for success in the business world.

When did you decide to go into business for yourself?
Originally, I never intended to enter the lighting business. I found fulfillment as a social worker, deeply enjoying the opportunity to make a positive impact in people's lives. Meanwhile, my husband, Peter Motwani, had a background in the retail lighting industry. When he made the decision to open Home Lighting of Frazer, we relocated our family to be closer to our new retail space in Pa. However, my own professional journey took an unexpected turn as I faced challenges in finding steady work as a social worker in the area. It was during this time that I began working in our retail space to support my family. Little did I know, it marked the beginning of an incredible chapter in my life—and in our family's business. Embracing this path, I have dived into the world of lighting and design—and the rest, as they say, is history.

What about this industry appealed to you?
Coming from a family of creatives, and with an interest in interior design, I found my perfect match in the retail lighting industry. This field allows me to merge my passion for interior design with my innate ability to connect with people on a personal level. The combination of my creative problem-solving skills and a deep understanding of design principles enables me to create exceptional lighting solutions. Throughout my career, I have countless examples of delighted customers whose spaces have been transformed through my expertise. Seeing their satisfaction and witnessing the positive impact of my work is incredibly fulfilling.

Who has been your biggest inspiration?
My family has always been my greatest source of inspiration. From my parents and in-laws to my supportive husband and, above all, my wonderful children, they have constantly motivated me to strive for greatness.

How do you define "success?"
For me, success is about going beyond achievements and material gains. It's about making a positive impact by delivering exceptional quality, exceeding expectations and creating lighting designs that bring joy to my customers. Additionally, success extends to giving back to the community and contributing to the betterment of society.

How do you unwind after a stressful day?
After a demanding day, I find comfort in cooking dinner and cherishing moments with my family.

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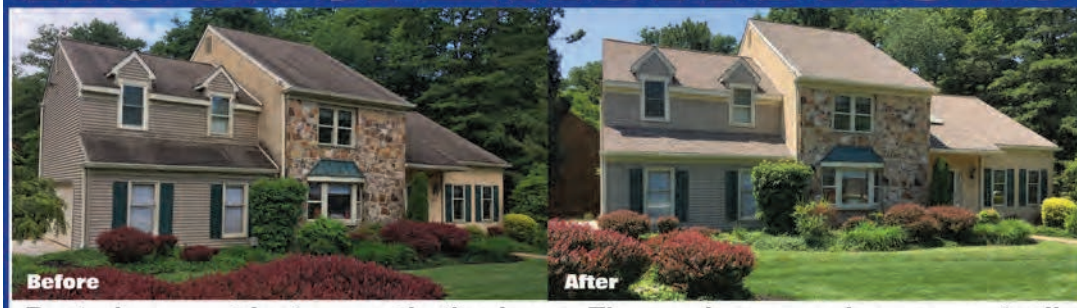
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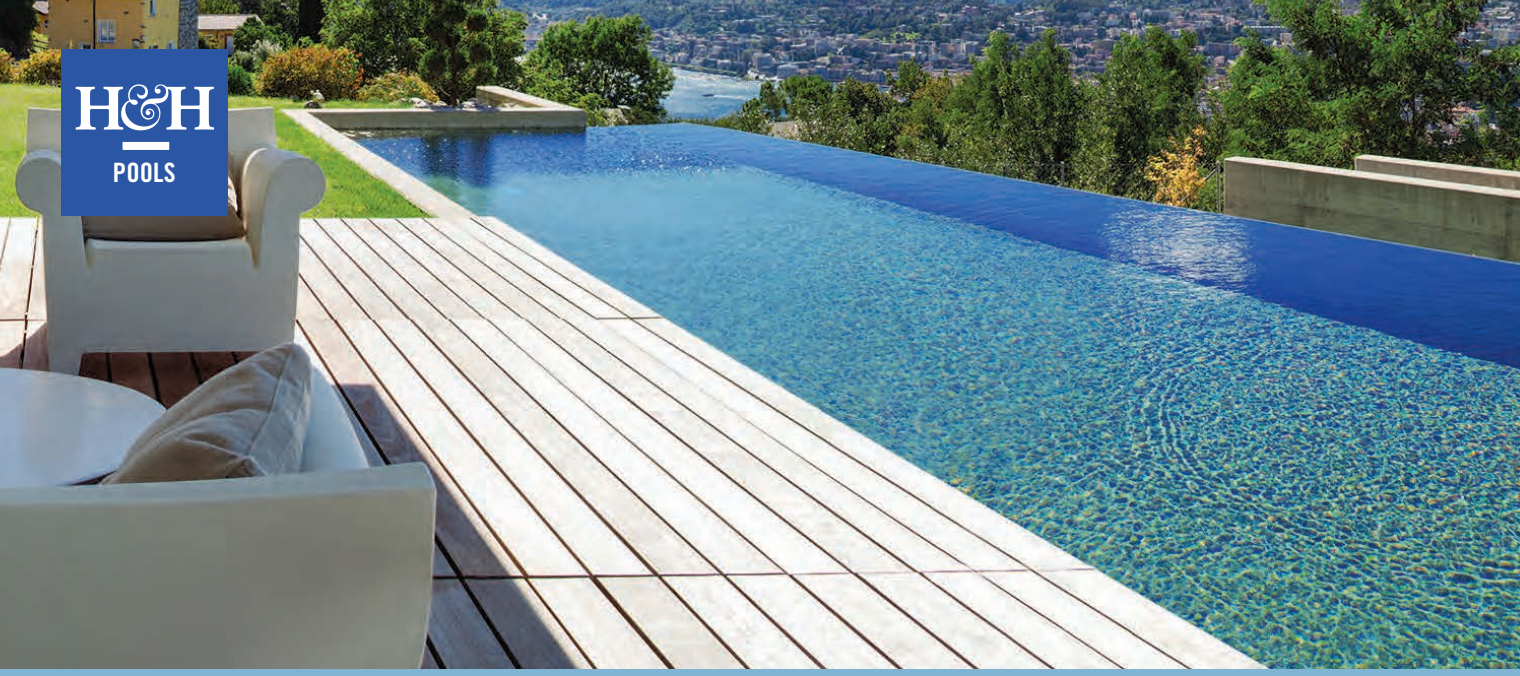
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DIVE INTO THE EXTRAORDINARY:

Exploring the World of Extreme Pools

by **Kristen Jorgensen**

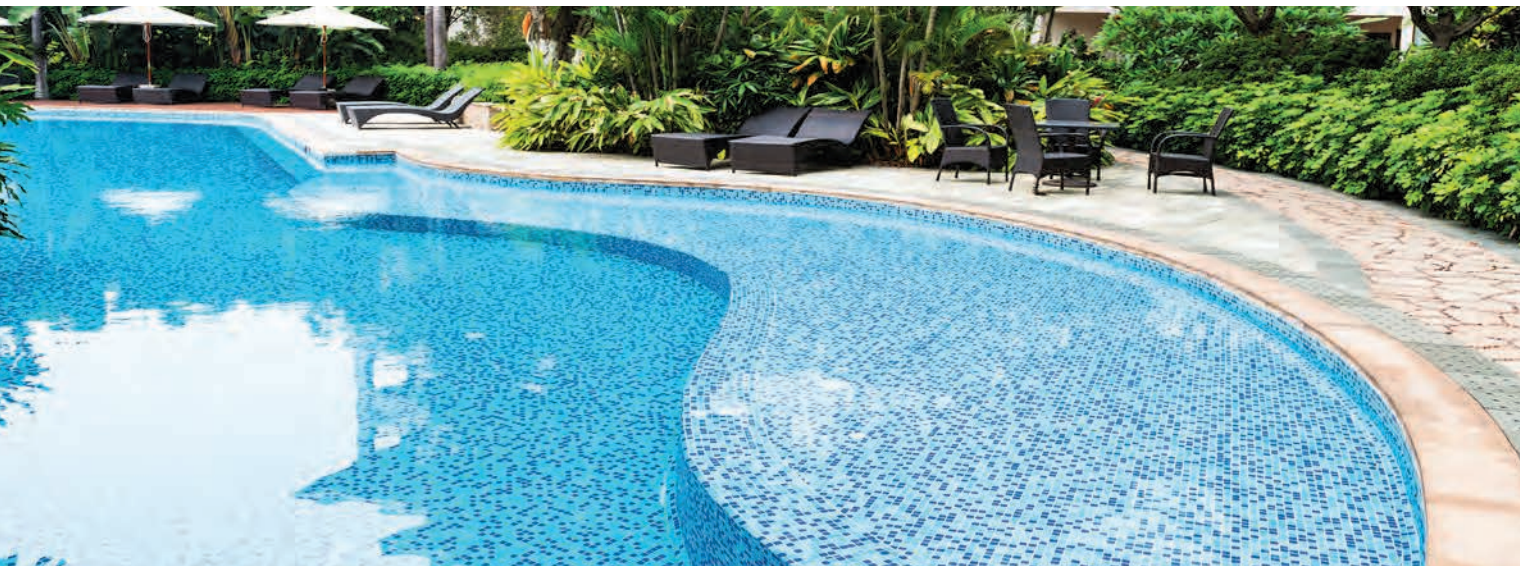
When it comes to swimming pools, most people envision a rectangular body of water surrounded by deck chairs, a place to relax and cool off during hot summer days. However, there is a breed of swimming pools that transcends the ordinary, pushing the boundaries of design, engineering and imagination. These extraordinary marvels are known as extreme pools. Join us as we dive into the world of extreme pools, where creativity knows no limits and aquatic adventures await.

Take the Plunge

Since living in a post-COVID era, homeowners are still finding the appeal in investing in home projects and creating escapism right in their own backyards. According to industry professionals, pool installations and custom design projects have increased over the last five years. "We have seen a vast range of projects over the past few years," explains Sam Waddell from SLS Landscaping. "We've designed and installed pools as small as 10 feet by 10 feet and as large as miniature water parks. It really comes down to the interest and budget of the client."

Bryan Hull from Del Val Pools & Spas concurs. "There are many new amenities from sun decks to swim-up bar tables that can be shared with people out of the pool, to gas-driven creative fire illumination. Waterfalls and fountains are long-lasting staples. It's about how to get the most out of your pool oasis."

A unique style of pool that seems to be growing in popularity is the plunge pool.









While traditional backyard pools are typically 15 feet wide and 30 feet long, plunge pools tend to be no larger than 10 by 20 feet. They are also flat-bottomed and shallow, usually around five feet deep, and less expensive to maintain and easier to build. "A plunge design allows for a pool to fit snugly into a sloped backyard without interfering with a 100-year-old live oak on the property," Waddell explains. "I think people that are drawn to plunge pools are looking for a smaller footprint because maybe they have more functional areas in their yard, which is also a more modern look."

Larger swimming pools don't allow for much else in the typical backyard, Waddell adds, while plunge pools leave space for dining and play areas. They can also "make your yard look and feel like a staycation spot."

Tanning Ledges

Don't let the name fool you, the shallow entry design of a tanning



H&H POOLS

ledge, or often referred to as a sun shelf, offers plenty of entertainment and options for adults, as well as kids too. So while you can use this feature as a spot to relax and to work on your tan, the benefits of a tanning ledge go beyond just catching a few rays.

For families with young children, tanning ledges offer babies and toddlers a place to splash and play without having to be fully submerged in the pool. It also gives little ones an easier entryway since pool steps can be difficult for young swimmers.

Tanning ledges can also be large enough for several pool-friendly lounge chairs to be partially submerged in the water, and umbrella stands can be incorporated into the design. It's like having a resort in your backyard.

Pools That Are Making a Splash

Freeform pools have also skyrocketed in popularity over the last few decades, and for good reason—they are a beautiful pool design concept. The freeform pool design is meant to mimic a natural body of water and to blend in with its surroundings, contributing to a more peaceful and natural backyard landscape.

"The benefit of freeform pools is the overall design flexibility. It doesn't matter what shape your backyard is, how much space you're working with, or whatever other unique requirements you have—a freeform design is a blank canvas, and you can make just about anything work," explains Andrew McFarlane of California Pools.

Another benefit of a freeform-style pool is all of the additional features you can add to the design. "We build a lot of freeform pools that feature everything from a classic large water slide to more unique additions like grottos. We also completed a project which was a freeform pool with a vanishing edge that looked off the top of the hill into the hillsides: A really stunning design and one of my favorite builds," says McFarlane.



Fire and Water Features

While outdoor fire features, like fireplaces and different varieties of fire pits, tend to be located on patios and decks, the latest pool design trends blend fire and water together. Both elements add drama that can elevate the look and feel of your pool. Whether you are looking for some added ambiance, warmth and lighting for nighttime swims, or a place to roast a few s'mores, there are plenty of ways to incorporate both fire and water features into your overall design.

"Rectangular pools with entertaining spaces, sunken bars, or fire pit areas, seem to be popular



and are also creating those social spaces homeowners are looking to gain when designing their pool," McFarlane adds.

Walk-in Pools

One of the most obvious upsides to a walk-in pool is the fact that you can just walk right in—it's right there in the name! You're replacing corner stairs with a long, wide slope. The slope in these types of pools means that it will get gradually deeper as you go. It's a lot like a wave pool you might see at an amusement park, minus the waves.

There's also no denying that walk-in pools can be aesthetically pleasing. Depending on what sort of patio you choose, you could make the whole space look just like a beach in your backyard.

The Spool

By blending the words spa and pool, you get a "spool." In recent years, pool builders have increased business with homeowners with tighter budgets and smaller properties who request water features that are smaller than traditional swimming pools but larger than standard spas. Many homeowners use a spool mostly for relaxation and entertaining—a place to soak and cool off on hot days or to enjoy drinks with friends on pleasant evenings. Spools may even have directional jets against which you can swim.

"Depending on how you outfit your spool, this type of pool will cost significantly less than a standard pool installation. Maintenance is also usually easier than with larger pools, but you will still have water chemistry and filter equipment to manage," explains Wadell.

Classic is Still Cool

With a world filled with architectural aquatic marvels, the classics have also had a resurgence according to Mike McCool from Swim-Mor Pools.

"Exotic pool styles are trending, but I have seen a major comeback in the classic Hamptons-style pool. Homeowners who are investing a lot of capital into their backyard projects are looking for longevity of style."

A great way to complete the Hamptons style aesthetic is to incorporate complementary landscaping. "We typically deck out the yard with landscaping and hardscaping native to things you would find in the Nantucket area. Plants like manicured boxwoods, hydrangeas, and variations of roses," says McCool

Extreme pools are not merely places to swim; they are architectural masterpieces, audacious experiments, and gateways to new experiences. From suspended transparent pools to infinity pools blending with the horizon; from natural wonders to underwater kingdoms; and urban oases defying conventions, these extraordinary aquatic creations take swimming to a whole new level. Whether you seek adventure, luxury or a harmonious connection with nature, extreme pools are designed to captivate and awe. So, dive in, explore the extraordinary, and let the magic of extreme pools transport you to a world where dreams become a reality. H&H

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