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WELCOME HOME Magazine

VOL. 28, NO. 2

SUMMER 2021

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by JB PRINTING CO.*

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* JB Printing is an O'Keefe Publishing company, and is the first printing company to be designated as a Clean Corporate Citizen by the Michigan DEQ

Welcome Home Magazine© is published quarterly

Welcome Home Magazine

3111 Lake Street, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49048

Phone 269-547-0333 / 269-349-9601

okeefepublishing@sbcglobal.net

www.welcomehomekzoo.com

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Summer Celebrations

Mango Salsa

Photography by Linda Hoard

This Mango Salsa is juicy, zesty and refreshing and is like summer in a bowl! It's super easy and can go together in 20 minutes. Just chop ripe mangos, red or green peppers or both, red onions and chopped cilantro and mix with the dressing that jazzes it up. You can keep it simple or substitute peaches for the mango, and customize it with other items you have on hand, such as black beans, corn or pineapple. Not only can you eat it with chips, but you can add it to your favorite curry recipe, or you can spoon it over fish or chicken. Make this Mango Salsa in advance for stress free summer entertaining.

Mango Salsa

4 small or 3 large mangos
Red & green pepper (1/2 each)
1 small red onion
Bunch chopped cilantro

Dice all ingredients into whatever size you prefer.
Mix together in a bowl and stir in dressing.

Dressing:

1/3 cup olive oil
1/3 cup balsamic vinegar
1/3 cup sugar
1 t salt
Juice of one lemon
3 cloves minced garlic

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Courtesy of J&J Glass

A screened porch can enhance your life and provide extra living space

By Barbara Fisher

There's nothing like the whine of a mosquito to drive us for the can of insect repellent or the safety of the house. Or you could continue to enjoy being outside protected by a screened porch that keeps away the insects as well as offers protection against showers and direct sun exposure.

"Screened rooms are making a comeback," says Gary Howe, owner of Howe Patio & Windows. And not only that, removable glass or polycarbonate panels can be added to extend the time the porch can be used. These panels are constructed to be small enough to be placed by the homeowner and can easily be stored when not in use explains Steven Cretsinger, Vice President, J&J Glass.

"There is no ideal size for screened porches. The ideal is what fits the needs of the homeowner and the overall design of the house," offers Cretsinger. A number of homeowners place a screened porch off a specific room, such as a



Courtesy of Howe Patio & Windows

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master bedroom, intending the porch to be a private location from which to read, enjoy a cup of coffee or gaze at the night sky. What kinds and how much furniture will be placed on the porch? Will it fit through all of the passages to get to its destination? If the porch will be elevated and an exterior door is planned, what kind of steps will offer the most functionality and aesthetics? If an exterior door is planned for a porch with a small footprint, Howe recommends the door open to the outside so that limited floorspace doesn't have to be kept clear to accommodate the swing of the door. If the porch is 32" or higher off the ground, fall protection is required. Fall protection may take many forms (e.g., permanently placed glass, polycarbonate, cable) but the most common is vertical spindles placed four inches apart topped off with chair rail. Howe says many homeowners use chair rail in the design of their porch for aesthetics even if it isn't required. When not required, there is flexibility to use spindles placed further apart and the height of the chair rail doesn't have to be 36" tall. While most porches are single-story affairs, porches may be works of art and enclose what was originally a multi-level deck or soar two stories tall.

Like any addition, homeowners will want to consider maintenance during the design phase. Maintenance needs vary depending on the construction materials used. Considerations include wood versus composite decking, the type of screening and the type of posts and framing used. Built with long-term use and maintenance in mind, homeowners can have a screened porch constructed that is virtually maintenance free and typically can be cleaned with a hose. Sign us up!! Cretsinger points out that wood decking is certainly attractive and more budget friendly but requires more maintenance. The same is true for posts, says Howe, for more maintenance free construction, homeowners will want to look at aluminum posts and frame with a powder coat finish, one of the most durable finishes on the market.

Homeowners also have a choice of the type of screen that goes into their porch. Fiberglass screen will forgive various impacts like hitting the screen with a chair leg but tends to trap odors and may not be the ideal choice if you're doing frequent barbecuing near or even in the enclosed area or if a family member is a heavy smoker. Charcoal colored aluminum screening is easier to clean and while a chair leg won't go through the screen, it might dent it. For homeowners with young children or pets who are likely to make rough contact with the screening, Howe recommends "pet screen" for the lower 36" of the structure all the way around. Accidents can happen and this heavier product can prevent disappointments and damage. Rescreening a porch is likely to be needed every 10-15 years or sooner in areas where small airborne particulate is likely to be heavy and the clogged screen openings become resistant to cleaning.

Most true screen porches are screened from floor to ceiling and from post to post. Regardless of the size of the porch, the majority of porches are made up of 4-4.5 foot panels for ease in replacing screening when necessary and preventing the inevitable sag when screen is stretched across too large a frame. Screened porches can be constructed in all sorts of colors with white being the most predominant. Bronze and various earth tones are also popular. Black trimmed windows are currently a hot color particularly in new construction and black screen porches are now popular as well. Posts and frames that are powder coated may be tinted to match any color.

Howe and Cretsinger stress that putting screening under the decking to prevent bugs from accessing the porch and your tranquility is a must. Aesthetically, using as few posts as possible is ideal so as not to obstruct the view.

It should go without saying, but it'll be said anyway: screened porches get wet. In torrential rains with wind, they can get quite wet. Apart from using outdoor furniture, porch

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construction needs to include a way for water to weep out of the structure. For elevated porches with deck style flooring, the water will weep out between the flooring planks through the screening below. If a single-story, second-story porch is built, remember whatever is below the porch is in the drip path. For structures with flooring that doesn't allow for water seepage below the decking, homeowners should consult their builder to ensure water is able to weep away while at the same time insect introduction is kept to a minimum.

J&J Glass manufactures and installs the screen panels as well as the panels designed to extend the time the porch may be used; the homeowner works with their favorite builder to construct the decking and framing coordinating with J&J Glass to ensure the project is a success. Howe is a licensed builder enabling Howe Patio & Windows to both design and construct the porch from start to finish.



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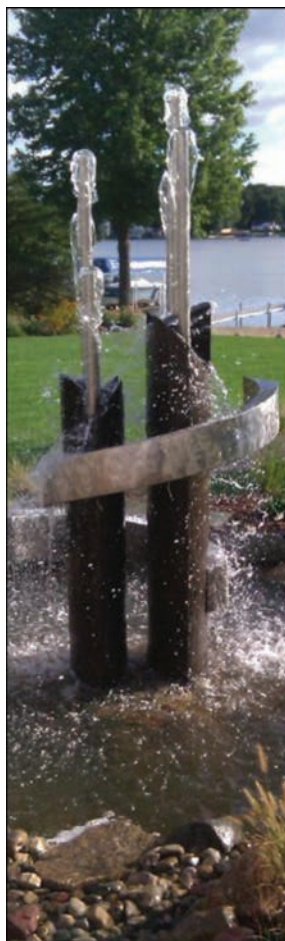
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Could Solar Power be Right for You?

By Barbara Fisher

The sun. It provides light. It provides heat. It, literally, holds the solar system together. And it can power your home, reduce or eliminate your electric bill and reduce your carbon footprint. What's not to like? Could soundlessly powering your home with the sun's energy be right for you?

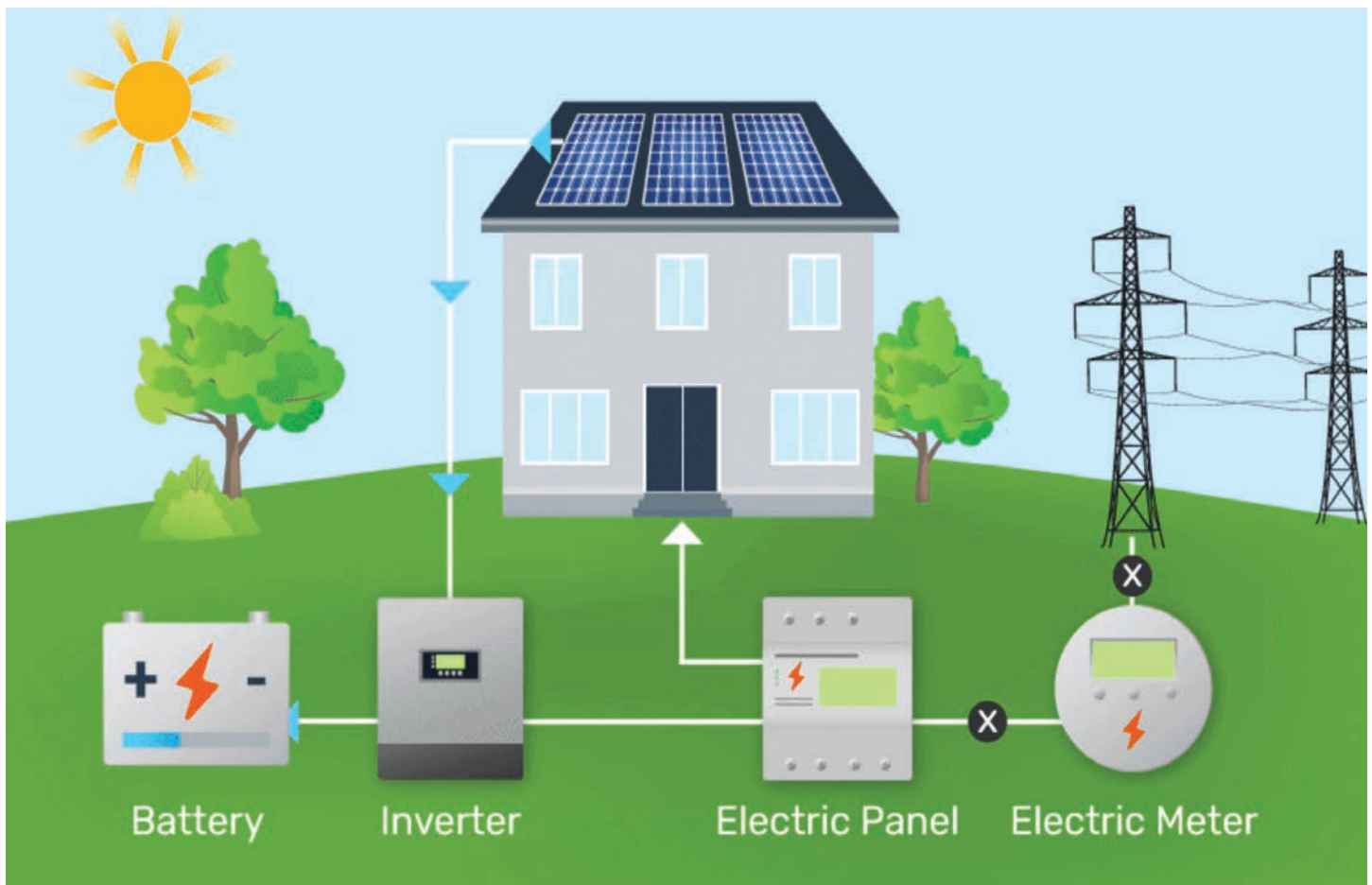
Simply put, solar panels convert energy from sunlight into energy to power your home. More technically, the solar panels absorb light and convert it to direct current (DC) power. The DC power travels through the system's inverter and is converted into alternating current (AC), the kind of power used by most households. Explains Don King, President and Owner of Solar King, LLC, the electricity generated is grid quality, the same quality you'd purchase from your utility company. King, who brings true passion to his work, was born and raised in Michigan and put in the time learning about the solar industry through hands-on work in direct and related fields before starting Solar King in 2014.

Financial and environmental reasons are the primary reasons residential (and commercial) customers consider solar. Financially, homeowners have only to look at their electric bill to recognize an opportunity for intervention. King quips that

climbing electrical bills are "predictably unpredictable" going on to say that energy costs have gone up an average of 4-6% annually. Equally important for many homeowners is the desire to reduce their carbon footprint through the adoption of a green energy source to benefit present and future generations.

Everyone jokes about Michigan weather and newscasters frequently offer the percentage of sun Michigan has received over a given period of time. So a legitimate question is whether Michigan gets enough sun to make solar panels worth the cost. The answer, says King, is a firm yes, "ambient temperatures [in Michigan] are perfect for maximum electric production. [Solar] panels are rated and tested at 77 degrees and will produce more power when they are cooler than when they are overheated." While panels do not operate at maximum production under heavy cloud cover, they do not sit idle either.

During the planning phase of any solar project, location of the panels is discussed. King notes that homeowners should insist this phase be done onsite. Ideally the panels will face south and be placed as high as possible at the optimal angle for the homeowner's latitude. (Yes, there's an app for that!) The object is to locate the installation in a place that receives the smallest



amount of shading from trees and other buildings. East or west-facing rooflines are workable; however, 15-20% of production will be lost. King notes that it's possible to compensate by installing additional panels or by utilizing ground-mounted systems. King notes that "many of the newer decorative homes have roofs that are just not at the perfect orientation to the sun to maximize solar production whereas a ground-mounted array can be installed facing due south at the optimal 30° angle for our area of the country."

Safety features, required by building codes and by the electrical company and backed up by inspections, are built into all system to keep both the homeowner's residence safe as well as to ensure the safety of the energy company power lines and its staff.

Homeowners will want to carefully check the warranty on the panels and components their selected installer plans to use. Panels should be warranted for 25-30 years and are actually expected to last 40-50 years; the vast majority of that time the system has already paid for itself and is generating free power for the homeowner.

Consumer's Energy offers a Distributed Generation Program. In brief, the energy generated by the homeowner's solar array will decrease the need to buy electricity from Consumer's Energy. When excess energy is produced (i.e., more energy is produced than is consumed), Consumer's Energy will credit the homeowner for use when the system isn't generating enough power to cover consumption. Customers receive status reports from Consumer's Energy plus homeowners can monitor their solar installation's operations at any time on their phone or computer using a separate independent app. It is possible to sell excess power back to Consumer's Energy or use solar to make a total break from utilizing a power company at all. By carefully choosing a solar company, the company will be able to help you determine the best option for your circumstances.

While the energy generated is "free" once electrical savings equal the upfront costs of the materials and installation, there are upfront costs until that breakeven point is reached. This point may be reached in as little as 6 years but more commonly between 7-10 years. The upfront costs to install a system vary based on current power usage, whether the homeowner wants to store energy through a battery system and how large a system is needed to support their electrical needs and/or end goals. Through advance planning, homeowners can have a system built that will easily accommodate enhancements (such as a battery system) in future years. King offers that "return on investment is based on how much power you produce and how long it will take to recover your initial investment." He goes on to say that return on investment is one factor; however, installing solar will also increase a home's value both now and at the time a homeowner sells the home.

To help with upfront costs, there is a federal tax rebate (the solar Investment Tax Credit) of 26% of the cost of 2021 installations. This credit drops to 22% in 2023 and sunsets after 2023. Should the amount of the credit exceed the tax due, the credit may be stretched out into subsequent tax years. There are a number of lenders from whom homeowners may seek loans. Like Solar King, reputable solar companies have cultivated various partnerships with lenders to provide options to allow homeowners to obtain the right solar system for their home at attractive interest rates.

Whether it's through a distributed generation program or a solar energy storage option, most of us can find a solar option to power our home at an affordable price.





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From City to Country: Building a Home to Welcome Family

By Zinta Aistars

Feature Photography by Jim Schuon Photography

Homeowner Laurie Gallo, manager of a medical device sales business, had no fear of building a home from the ground up. She had done it four times before. It was a matter of trust and research for her.

"I liked what I had in my previous home in Hinsdale, Illinois—near Chicago—and I wanted something similar near Kalamazoo, with just a few changes," Gallo said. "I researched builders for four years for my previous home. I had the advantage this time that I knew Matt Watts, I had seen homes he had built, and I knew this was the builder I wanted."

A personal connection helped, but Matt Watts, vice president of operations at Watts Homes & Construction at 5071

Gull Road in Kalamazoo, was willing to go the extra mile for his customers. In fact, several hundred miles.

"My wife Beth and I drove to Hinsdale to look at Laurie's house there," Watts said. "I wanted to see the features of that house that she wanted in a new house."

It is that kind of attention, Watts said, he is willing to give to any client. Watts Home is a third-generation family business (Don Watts, his father, is the architect; Joyce Watts, his mother, is corporate secretary), and he attributes that to what he calls the The Watts Difference—a reputation for quality and customer satisfaction. Yet another benefit is that both he and sister, Joy Watts, president of the company, have real estate





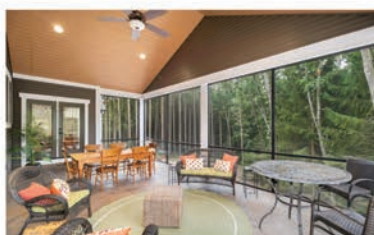
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A modern living room with a white sectional sofa adorned with blue and patterned pillows. A glass coffee table with a decorative base holds a vase of white flowers. Two blue armchairs are positioned in the foreground. In the background, a kitchen area with white cabinetry and a wooden wall with a TV are visible. The text "CORK LANE DECORATING" is overlaid in blue on the left, and "Shop at Home" is written in a cursive font on the right.

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WHAT STAYS, WHAT GOES

One of Gallo's requirements for the new home was that it be located near Interstate-94, for easy access for return trips she would have to make to Chicago and the surrounding area for her work. Watts had just the neighborhood—a new development in the Richland area with large, wooded lots.

Gallo chose a near 2-acre lot with old pines and tall poplars. After years of city living, she was looking forward to the wooded privacy and surrounding wildlife.

Gallo also gave Watts the blueprints from her previous home as a starting point.

"This is my 'forever home,' where I will eventually retire," she said. "So I gave that thought in the kind of design I wanted, that it would be accessible, for instance, to wheelchairs should I ever have that need down the road."

WIDER DOORWAYS, CHECK. MAIN FLOOR LIVING, CHECK.

Watts shaved off the second floor of Gallo's previous home to create a Craftsman-style ranch house. With an expansive main floor of 3,100 square feet and a lower level with walkout of 1,895 square feet, he moved what were once second floor bedrooms to the main and lower floors.

The house features four bedrooms with three-and-a-half baths, a great room with gas and wood-burning fireplace on the main floor with 9-foot ceilings and a great room with wet bar on the lower level, a main floor office, a laundry room, and a screened-in back porch. The chef's kitchen features Pioneer cabinets, Thermador appliances, and a center island. A walk-in pantry completes the set-up. Floors are a dark hardwood by ProSource. The house also has a three-car garage.

TAKING SHAPE FOR THE PARADE OF HOMES

"The build began in April 2019, and since I was still living in Hinsdale at that time, Matt and his wife sent me videos to show me progress on the house," Gallo said.

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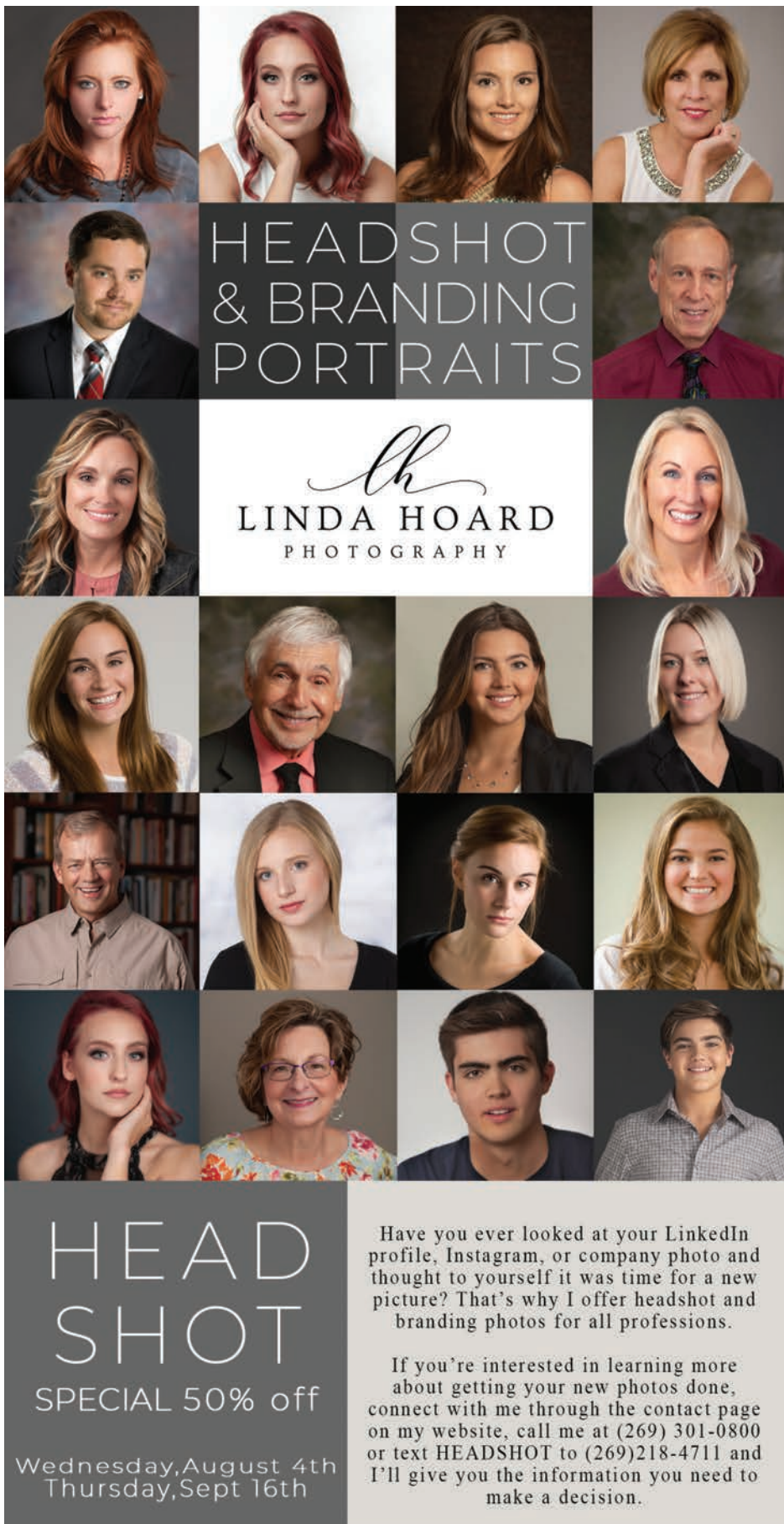


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It was important to Gallo to stay on budget, and the construction came in on budget with one exception, she said. She had chosen a lot on a slope. To give the construction a level base, fill dirt had to be brought in on trucks.

"That was the only thing that I hadn't planned for," Gallo said. "Otherwise, if I ever had a question, I knew I could call the builder and get my answers."

When it came to choosing finishes and various options, Gallo knew what she wanted.

The front of the chocolate-brown house has four different textures with accents of stone, brick, and cedar-shake style siding.

"The same stone was used for an outdoor fireplace I wanted in back of the house," said Gallo. "I wanted to keep things rustic there, to enjoy the woods and wildlife—deer and wild turkeys—that come by."

Gallo chose autumn colors for décor—browns, oranges, rust tones—and spread her mother's colorful quilts across the beds, making house into home.

"We had a delay over the spring when the pandemic began," Watts said. "But the house was ready for the Parade of Homes in August 2020."

"The Parade went through Saturday, and Sunday I moved in," Gallo said.

As fall turned to winter, Gallo has enjoyed her energy-efficient new home.

"Everything is so solid and secure," she says. "I've been pleased with the surprisingly low energy bills."

As Gallo greeted her first winter in the new home, she has snowshoed wooded trails behind the property, and she has enjoyed frequent visits from family and grandchildren.

"My sister visits often enough that I dedicated one of the bedrooms just for her," Gallo said.

Her advice to others considering new construction is "don't overthink the options. Don't be afraid to build new. If you have done your research and feel like you can trust your builder, don't get overwhelmed with the details. Make your choices and let go—and enjoy."





Adding Appeal at the Curb

By Zinta Aistars

First impressions matter. For a home, that means curb appeal.

And even though we are told throughout our lives to not judge something by its exterior, arguably that does not apply to a house. The exterior of a home is its shell of not only beauty, but protection of all that is within.

With nine Michigan locations, the Eikenhout family business was established by Hendrick Eikenhout in Grand Rapids in 1894. It later branched out to Kalamazoo at 5669 East Cork Street along with other locations across the state. Eikenhout offers siding, roofing, windows, doors, decks, and railing—all the makings of a beautiful and durable exterior for the home.

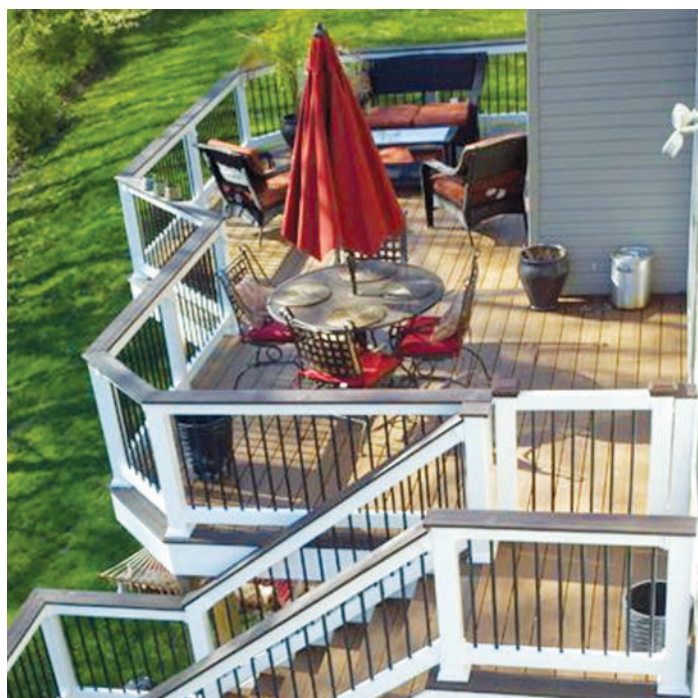
“We started with roofing and expanded from there,” says Nick Carley, branch manager. “We don’t do installation, but work with contractors, and we have a showroom of siding and roofing, all manner of building supplies for the customer to look at—and then the contractor does the rest.”

The Eikenhout showroom, in fact, is so well stocked with color samples that Carley says customers can find that the hardest part of their decision is choosing a color for siding.

“Vinyl siding is easily our most popular option for the exterior of a home,” he says. “It’s easy to install, durable, and easy to maintain—and it comes in something like 700 colors. Current trends are for the darker colors, such as a darker blue that is currently popular, but darker colors can actually be more expensive because darker siding can take longer to make.”

Eikenhout offers CertainTeed and Mastic Home Extérieurs brands in vinyl siding. Good quality siding can also help create

a home that is energy efficient, effectively sealing in the climate control technology inside the home and allowing for peak performance.



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Siding is not just a consideration for new construction, however. Re-siding on an existing home is an option when old siding begins to show damage—dents, gouges, cracks that may allow moisture to enter below the surface or drafts that can make a home uncomfortable. It can also refresh the look of a house and give it an entirely different appearance.

When choosing siding, consider more than just color. You will also want to consider matching—or contrasting—colors with window and other trim and roofing, other finishes of the home. Mixing up textures and directions, adding areas of vertical siding with horizontal, can also add interest. Adding accents of wood, brick, shingles, or stone trim (or a stone veneer) can create a great look. Siding that appears to have a wood grain is also available, and it is more maintenance-free while being less costly than real wood.

Locally owned and operated by the Lyster brothers since 2000, Lyster Exteriors at 2324 Cambridge Drive in Kalamazoo, sells siding, windows, roofing, decks, gutters, and insulation. They also offer repairs and installation. Matthew, president, and his brother Mark, vice president and production manager, oversee the business.

“We started with our first office in Climax, but as our business grew, we expanded into Kalamazoo,” Lyster says.

CertainTeed and Mastic Home Exteriors brands are available at their showroom, too. CertainTeed has digital tools to help homeowners see what their choices could look like on their homes before buying.

“Vinyl siding is almost always the customer choice,” Mark Lyster says. “It’s long-lasting, nearly maintenance-free, and durable in all kinds of weather conditions. And our products come with a 10-year workmanship warranty and a 25-year manufacturer’s warranty.”

The CertainTeed brand includes vinyl siding, Cedar Impressions polymer shakes and shingles that have the appearance of cedar, and Stone Façade stone veneers that install easily as a panelized system.

“People usually know what they want when they come in,” Lyster says. “It takes about four days on average to install siding.”

After installation, maintenance usually means little more than the occasional power wash.

“I power wash my own house every other year,” Lyster says. “It’s what I recommend to keep the siding looking good and to remove any dirt and mold.”

Power washing can be done by a professional service or by the homeowner—but if doing the power washing yourself, work up the pressure gradually to be sure it does not damage the siding.

Both businesses agree—it can be a tough time to buy any kind of housing material. Because of a year of businesses closing or temporary locking down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, supply has backed up while demand has soared. With that, prices have taken a steep climb.

“If you are planning on building or remodeling, plan for longer lead times,” Carley says. “Stock at most businesses is much lower. Originally, we had a wait of two to four weeks when ordering siding, but we are now seeing eight-week waits. That means higher prices, too.”

The business owners expect that it may take up to a year for that slow-down in lead times and corresponding price rises to even out once again.



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Flexibility in Design for the Flexible Lifestyle

By Zinta Aistars

COVID-19 changed everything. One of the most profound changes of the past year and beyond has been how we work—and where we work.

"People are reassessing their homes as workplaces, even beyond COVID," said Kitty Copeland, owner of KalamazooKitty at 581 Romence Road in Portage. At KalamazooKitty, she sells quality consignment furniture with accessories and offers design services. Copeland also stages homes that are up for sale in the real estate market.

"Many companies, too, are reevaluating employees working from home," she said. "It's worked out well for everyone, productivity is good, so people may continue to work from home even beyond COVID."

If anyone feared that employees might be lax with work obligations without a boss breathing down their necks, that was not what the past year has shown. Home offices have turned out to be time-and cost-efficient, both for the employee and the employer.

WORKING FROM HOME, FOR MANY, IS HERE TO STAY

With that, homeowners have been taking a second look at their home floor plans. Rooms that see little use are being reassessed as home offices, but also for other purposes, such as school rooms.

"Shoppers are coming in looking for multi-purpose furniture," Copeland said. "They want dining room tables that can fold down and be used as desks. Dining room chairs need to be more comfortable for sitting, not just during meals. They want ottomans that can be used for storage for school supplies,

because people with children have had to teach their children from home."

Copeland said most often she is seeing dining rooms become what are called "flex rooms," rooms that are flexible enough to be used for multiple purposes.

"I steer people away from using their bedrooms for office space, because that pile of work there on your desk is going to keep you awake," Copeland said. "But spare bedrooms, if you have them, can work as do finished basements. Unfinished basements are too uncomfortable. But dining rooms are usually best because they are also often near the front entrance, and if you have clients coming in, you may just need to add French doors for privacy, some multi-functional pieces, and you're all set."

ASKING WHAT IF TO EXPLORE OPTIONS

"I always start with a conversation," said Marla Bruemmer, owner and residential designer at Design Evolutions in Kalamazoo and South Haven. "We discuss the homeowners' wants and needs for each room, one by one. And then we go through the what-ifs. What if a parent comes to visit? What if you work from home? If you work from home, how do you work?"

Approaching a home already in use, Bruemmer said, is different than new construction.

"Different animal," she said. "If you are already living in the home, we look at how it fits your needs and how we can work with what is already there. With new construction, we define functions of spaces you will build. Do you need privacy



ALL ABOUT STORAGE AND GETTING ORGANIZED

Flex rooms aren't just for work.

"I'm getting a lot of requests for home gyms," said Bette Hall, co-owner with Ron Hall and lead designer at Hall's Closets & More, 8675 Portage Road in Portage.

After people finish their workday, Hall said, they want space for working out. They may also want quiet space for meditation, for yoga, or perhaps a retreat to the arts and crafts room or sewing room. It often comes down to storage and easily made changes that keep a space flexible for multiple uses.

"A home gym can quickly turn into a playroom with the right storage for kids' toys, or a place to store yoga mats and weights," Hall said. "It can be done with organized storage space and shelving with doors."

Another aspect of a home gym, Hall said, can be in the flooring. Marley floors, made from high-quality vinyl that is heavy duty and non-slip, are portable floors that can easily be rolled out across a floor surface.

"They are often used in dance studios, but you can lay them down for working out," Hall said. "A portable floor can make a big difference in a flex room."

Other easily changeable furnishings can include Murphy beds, which fold up into a closet space but can be pulled down again to create a guest bedroom when needed.

"Those bonus rooms often don't have closets," Hall said. "But with the addition of storage units built in, or adding some drawers, some floating shelves, furniture pieces that can be tucked and folded away, or even portable Marley floors, those bonus rooms become multi-purpose flex rooms for today's living."



in a certain space? Do you want a view over other rooms? Do you want your office at front or back of the house? Will you need a separate entrance?"

Retrofitting a home already lived in, Bruemmer said, can be as simple as dedicating an alcove in a spare bedroom with a desk, and switching a bed with a sleep sofa for a flex room that can be used for guests as well as an office.

"I most often see that those guest bedrooms are no longer dedicated rooms," she said. "Guest bedrooms can also be used as homeschool classrooms or playrooms by adding extra storage."

To avoid working overtime, Bruemmer recommends keeping the home office separate from the living spaces of the home.

"I've been working from my home for 25 years," she smiled. "I know how that is. It's important to know when to turn off the work hours and leave time for family and relaxation, so especially with new construction, we plan the office somewhere tucked away."

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