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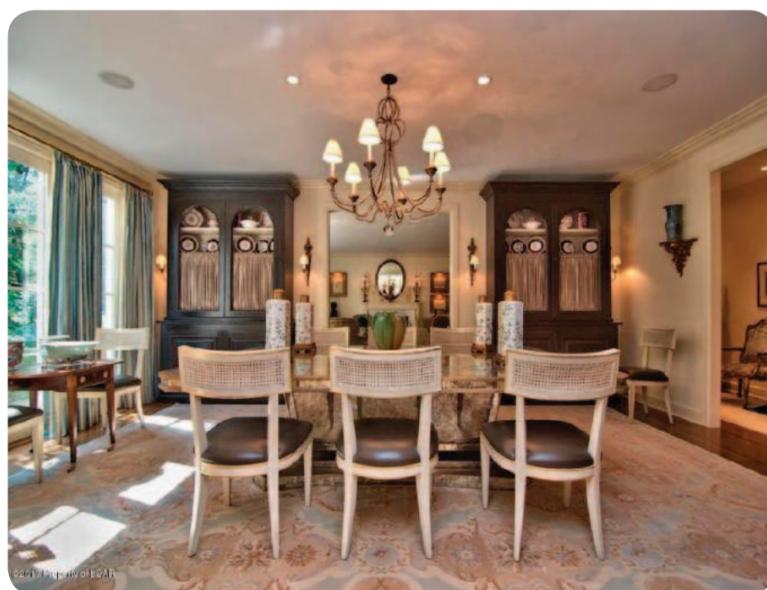
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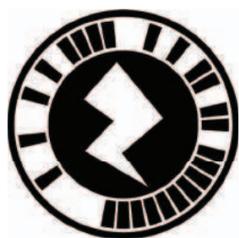
# Distinctive Properties

## Elegant Waverly Ranch

1410 Abington Road North • Waverly  
Listed by Margaret Simms of Lewith and Freeman, Shavertown • Office: (570) 696-0891  
MLS #17-5854 \$1,500,000



For additional photos visit [www.gwbar.org](http://www.gwbar.org) and enter MLS #17-5854 or scan the Zappar Code for a virtual tour.



Elegant, sprawling ranch with meticulous attention to detail. French doors in large bright rooms open to surrounding Bluestone patio and terraced private setting. Stunning formal and informal rooms. Outstanding chef inspired kitchen, neat coffee/wet bar, seven large bedroom suites featuring lovely baths, four car garage, pet grooming area, all beautifully crafted and appointed. Want a virtual tour? Scan the Zappar app to the left. See page 2 for instructions.

## Kitchen Tips and Trends from Top Value

### Trending on top

Sleek, maintenance-free Quartz countertops continue to gain popularity, especially in white, marble-influenced patterns. Granite is still trending downward. Laminate (like Formica) usage remains low and acrylic solid surface (Corian, et al.) has been dead since the 90's though now everyone will finally admit to it.

### Tonal shift

White-painted shaker cabinetry. Still ranking at the top of the list of cabinetry, there has been a steady erosion of that market share by greys, and other muted paint colors. Accent pieces in bold blues and greens are creeping in as well. Mixing cabinet colors within the space can lend a great deal to the dramatic effect.

### Trendy again?

No, the unrepentant, over-indulgence of polished brass fixtures of the late 80's and early 90's isn't back, but cabinet hardware in softer gold hues, like Honey Bronze from Top Knobs pair well with grey

and blue-toned cabinetry and white-toned quartz counters.

### Work zone focus

Task-oriented base cabinetry with integrated pull-out conveniences, oversized pot and pan drawers, utensil caddies, spice racks, plate storage, and concealed trash bins take the strain off of upper cabinets. This allows for fewer above-counter cabinets and therefore leads to more relaxed, open-feeling kitchen spaces.

### Wood for the sake of wood

A lot of nice wood is being hidden behind paint on cabinetry these days, and that is an enduring shame. Stained wood cabinets (yes, even Oak) are becoming more popular, though the color tones and design elements are more in touch with today's minimal-leaning aesthetic. Palette-bending grey stains, like Omega Cabinetry's "Porch Swing" and "Chinchilla" are a great way to showcase the texture of woods like Quartersawn White Oak in a non-traditional way.



Scan the Zappar Code to the right to see some of Top Value's kitchens.

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## Distinctive Properties REAL ESTATE



# The Secret to Agent Success

Why your real estate agent is the MVP of your home buying team

By Erik J. Martin | CTW Features

In basketball, every position on your starting five plays a major role. Your point guard sets up the offense. Your center serves as a pivot and low post threat. And your power forward is often a key defender and rebounder. But it's your go-to scorer whom you typically rely on to rack up the points and win the contest.

In the game of real estate, your agent, who serves as MVP of your home buying squad, plays this role. Think of him or her as your personal LeBron James – a versatile expert skilled at many positions who can lead you to the promised land of your first home by putting you on the right path to the right property – right away.

"A good agent can save you valuable time by identifying the best homes that fit your criteria, typically narrowing your search very quickly to the top five or so options. With an experienced agent on your side, you won't have to spend weeks or months going from one open house to another to find the perfect place," says Jay Batra, broker/founder with New York City-based Batra Group Real Estate. "Plus, they sometimes have access to inventory even before it hits the market."

What's more, your agent can help assemble the rest of your team.

"They can manage all the parties involved and the entire process on your behalf," says Elizabeth Convery, founder/broker with VERY Real Estate in Philadelphia. "They likely have relationships with all the other team members you'll need – including a lender, inspector, title company and property attorney – and can make recommendations to you accordingly."

Seth Lejeune, Realtor with Berkshire Hathaway Fox & Roach in Malvern, Pa., notes that these latter benefits are particularly important.

"Most agents have preferred vendors they can suggest. Having a team of familiar vendors can increase the chances of a smooth transaction," says Lejeune, who adds that you can choose these professionals yourself and aren't obligated to go with your agent's recommended experts.

Additionally, an experienced agent knows the ins and outs of specific areas and the types of homes that can pay you back later with higher resale value, "which helps protect your investment. They can also help ensure that you buy something that will fulfill your needs now and in the future," says Laura Schwartz, Realtor with Keller Williams Realty in McLean, Va.

What's the difference between a Realtor, an agent and a broker, you ask? According to the National Association of Realtors (NAR), any person who earns a real estate license can be called an agent, whether that license is as a sales professional, an associate broker or a broker. A broker, meanwhile, has earned education exceeding the agent level (as mandated by state laws) and has passed a broker's license exam. A Realtor is either an agent or broker and is an NAR member; a Realtor must abide by that organization's code of ethics and its 17 articles, enforced by local real estate boards.

The "Realtor" title (a trademarked term) "is an added protection that your agent will act ethically, with integrity, and cooperate with other real estate professionals, which is a critical component once you start negotiating a home purchase," Convery notes.

To help choose the right agent or Realtor for you, it's important to follow recommended criteria.

"This person should be a good communicator and listener – someone who's easy to talk to and understands what you're looking for," says Jen Teague, Realtor with Keller Williams Ellis County in Waxahachie, Texas.

## Experience can make a big difference

"Pick someone who has been licensed for at least a few years and who can furnish a list of closed sales. You don't want someone who does this part-time as a side gig," Schwartz cautions.

## Listen to your gut instincts

"You should work with someone you trust," Batra says. "It's also good to select an agent who specializes in your neighborhood and has sold similar houses in the area."

To help you narrow down the right real estate candidate, ask these questions:

How long have you been licensed and how many sales have you closed?

Are you an agent or Realtor? Full-time or part-time?

Will I be working directly with you or someone else from your team?

What sets you apart from other agents?

What's your strategy to help me save time and money?

Do you have online reviews I can see or past clients I can contact?

## The Friends and Family Plan

Not sure where to find a worthy agent? Ask comrades and kin for referrals, say the experts.

"Word of mouth is far more powerful than a handful of Zillow reviews," says Realtor Seth Lejeune.

Broker Elizabeth Convery agrees.

"A referral could be as simple as an introduction email directly to a real estate agent or the handing over of a business card," she says.

The best referrals are from trusted folks who've satisfactorily completed a real estate transaction within the past year or two.

Also, seek referrals from folks within your generation if possible.

"If you're 28 and your parents recommend a great Realtor who's 71, that may not be the best fit," Lejeune says.

Lastly, "don't feel pressured to use someone just because a relative referred them. Research any recommended names carefully," suggests Realtor Laura Schwartz.

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MLS# 17-5832 RAE 570-714-9234  
or RHEA 570-696-0677 \$1,800,000



**DALLAS** Stately, brick Colonial on 2+ acres in the Back Mountain. Home features 6BR, 5BA, fully finished walk-out basement w/full KIT and 3/4BA. Professional landscaping and beautiful wooded setting.

TRISTA 570-715-9350 or RHEA 570-696-6677  
MLS#16-4586 \$699,000



**SHAVERTOWN** Stunning home-Very spacious w/open floor plan set on 26 acre lot. Views from every room. HW floors, custom built-ins in FR & office. Gourmet KIT opens to breakfast area w/spectacular view. LL finished & can be separate living quarters. 4 car garage.

MLS# 17-1732 GERI 570-696-0888 \$659,000



**DALLAS** Fabulous front porch on this custom home situated in a private country setting with a reservoir view. Recently updated baths and kitchen. Two story family room with floor to ceiling hearth. Gorgeous backyard with a pool and an outdoor kitchen.

JILL HISCOX 570-696-0875 or JOAN 570-696-0887  
MLS# 16-5913 \$638,000



**SHAVERTOWN** Convenient location in prestigious Slocum Estates. Custom built, 6 year old 2-Story w/MBR on 1st floor. Open 2-Story FR w/gas FP, HW floors, 6BR, 4.5BA. LL finished w/movie theater. Walk out basement to professionally landscaped back yard w/privacy fence. Whole house generator, 3 car garage.

MLS# 18-1000 GERI 570-0888 \$509,900



**MOUNTAIN TOP** Exquisite Hallmark home offers 4900SF w/4BR plus office, 5BA, over 2 acres of land w/in-ground pool, finished basement w/full KIT, 3/4BA, gas FP.

MLS# 18-1121  
TRISTA 570-715-9318 \$509,000



**DALLAS** Beautiful Colonial 3BR home on 8.6 acres. Perfect spaces for entertaining, freshly painted, modern KIT w/SS appliances & soapstone counters. MLS#18-79

SHANNON 570-696-0720 \$499,900



**DALLAS** Magnificent 4BR home with a huge modern KIT, large FR w/FP, 5BA. Pool w/cabana, large corner lot. A must see! MLS# 18-925

TERRY ECKERT 570-696-0843 \$489,900



**SHAVERTOWN** Meticulously maintained-this 3-Story sets on 1.7 acre lot. Modern KIT w/quartz countertops, 2-Story foyer w/stone FP & dramatic windows. 3rd floor BR suite/BA, freshly painted throughout. LL finished w/projection screen, perfect for entertaining. Whole house generator. A must see property!

MLS# 18-596 GERI 570-696-0888 \$480,000



**SOUTH ABINGTON** Completely updated home in the sought after Harmony Ridge sub-division. Bamboo flooring throughout the main level. Dream kitchen with a large granite island, tiled backsplash and stainless appliances. Kitchen opens to a lrg family room with a vaulted ceiling. Separate office on main level. Modern baths. Beautifully landscaped yard with a paver patio - perfect for a pool! Cul-de-Sac location.

MLS#18-344 JOAN 570-696-0887 \$474,900



**SHAVERTOWN** Hillbrook Farms- Impressive 2-Story home set on private 4.5 acre lot. FR w/FP, built-in entertainment center & cathedral ceiling. 1st floor MBR, eat-in KIT w/large center island w/granite top. Private deck w/hot tub.

MLS# 17-6382 GERI 570-696-0888 \$460,000



**HARVEY'S LAKE** Terrific 4BR, 3.1BA, 3900SF home on 4.14 acres. LR w/FP; DR w/Red Oak HW. Large, eat-in, Maple & tile KIT w/island; sliders to deck; 1st fl FR w/FP; MBR suite; rec room w/FP, new 3/4BA; 1st fl laundry; 2 garages, lots more! See Virtual Tour.

MLS# 18-400 RAE 570-714-9234 \$439,000



**MOUNTAIN TOP** Showroom Perfect - open living area, KIT w/stainless and granite, 1st floor BR & BA, 4BR upstairs w/2BA, 3 car garage.

MLS# 18-971 MARIBETH 570-696-0882  
\$435,000



**HAZLETON** Immaculate 4BR, 3BA home has 2-Story FR w/stone FP & large windows overlooking the paver patio. Entertainers KIT features upgraded granite counters and Terrazzo tile floors. First floor features BR w/.75BA. Second floor has 2BR and MBR. There is large 3 car garage and unfinished basement for extra storage.

MLS# 17-5587 MIKE 570-501-7584 \$434,900



**MOOSIC** Beautiful corner town residence at the top of Glenmaura's offers exceptional landscaping, privacy, neutral tones and quality throughout. The first floor is graced with rich moldings, HW flooring, gas frpl, custom shutters and blinds, modern kitchen with stainless steel appliances, tile backsplash and Michael Aram hardware. Stunning staircase, DR with oversized windows, 3 Bedrooms, 4 baths with custom tile work, Finished walkout LL 2 car garage. Location overlooks lush common area open space. MLS# 17-5754

VIRGINIA ROSE 570-714-9253 \$425,000



**DALLAS** This unique 3/4BR Condo at The Greens features exceptional golf course views, an airy custom floor plan, wonderful 1st floor MBR suite, loads of well placed built-ins and a bright spacious KIT w/large island and eating area. Enjoy carefree living, golf, tennis and swimming. Covenants apply. Measurements are approximate.

MARGY 570-696-0891 or RHEA 570-696-6677  
MLS# 17-2439 \$395,000



**DRUMS** Custom, exceptional Sand Springs Colonial. 4-5BRs, 3 full Basement, 3 car garage. Amazing views.

JOYCE 570-501-7589 or MIKE 570-501-7584  
MLS# 18-1011 \$392,500



**HARDING** Unique home in serene 7+ acre setting with 40 x 40 barn and beautiful heated pool. The great room features a stone FP, vaulted ceiling and opens to the expansive deck. Handsome granite accents the oak counters in the large open floor plan KIT/dining area. 4BR, 4BA, finished LL has great bar and gym. Home is complete with 3 car garage, generator and greenhouse.

MLS#17-3419 JULIO 570-239-6408 \$360,000



**SHAVERTOWN** Bright and airy 2-Story home set on 2.4 acre lot. FR w/2-story FP. HW floors flow throughout 1st floor. 4BR, new MBA, KIT w/center island & eat-in area. 4 season room leads out to beautiful grounds, circular driveway. Sewer available at the street.

MLS# 18-857 GERI 570-696-0888 \$359,900



**BEAR CREEK** This home is in a "Beautiful" location in Laurelbrook Estates. It is on a private 4 acre lot.

SANDY 570715-9338 or DAVID 570-970-1117  
MLS# 18-125 \$354,900



**DALLAS** Beautifully updated KIT highlights this stunning 2-Story with gorgeous entry, 4BR, 2.5BA, finished LL. Fabulous neighborhood! All you have hoped for!

MLS# 18-59 TRACY 570-696-0723 \$347,000



**DALLAS** Gracious 2-Story on large, level lot. FP, HW floors, stainless appliances in KIT, large new patio, 4BR, 2.5BA, 2 car garage. Call today!

MLS#17-5444 SALLY 570-714-9233 \$335,000



**WEST PITTSSTON** A rare find! 4BR, 3BA Victorian w/large rooms. Modern, eat-in KIT, amazing MBR suite, 2nd floor laundry, gas heat. Library could be 5th BR. NEVER FLOODED!

MLS#18-541 MARY MOONEY 570-714-9274  
\$329,900



**MOUNTAIN TOP** Wonderful 2-Story on 1.84 acres in Blue Ridge Golf Course. This home offers 4BR, 2.5BA, modern KIT, finished basement, screened in porch, HW through out 1st floor and freshly painted!

LISA 570-715-9335 OR PATTY 570-715-9332  
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## Distinctive Properties REAL ESTATE



# Give It Your Best Offer

Smart strategies to buy in a tight market.

By Marilyn Kennedy Melia | CTW Features

Remember playing musical chairs? For many eager first-time buyers, house hunting will remind them of that childhood game where everyone was scrambling to secure a place, but someone invariably lost out. With a limited supply of lower or moderately priced homes in many areas, multiple buyers are often competing for the same home.

“When a property looks good and is priced well, if it goes on the market on Friday, there will be multiple offers by Monday,” says Jim Fite, president, Century 21, Judge Fite in Dallas-Ft. Worth.

But if a buyer misses out on one home – or even two, three, or more – all is not lost. Determined, flexible and creative buyers can still land a home to call their own, say agents.

Here, a look at strategies that could help first-timers find their way home:

## 1. Size up the competition

A competent real estate agent will know that a property will attract quick buyer interest. In some cases, a listing agent will even inform a buyer’s agent that there are other offers coming in.

Moreover, when there’s a flurry of interest, “the selling agent can give you a deadline, like Tuesday at noon, to submit your ‘best and final offer,’” says Mark Trompeter, of Weichert Realtors, Jersey City, N.J.

“This term doesn’t mean anything legally,” he adds, because there might be further negotiations. Still, in these instances, a buyer will put forth an offer with the highest price he’s willing or able to pay, with the most attractive terms [see below] he can promise.

In other scenarios, when to submit your best offer is a judgment call.

“Say a home goes on the market on Wednesday and there’s an open house on the weekend,” Trompeter says. “A client might be excited and want to offer right away, but I might say, ‘Let’s wait until the open house to see what the interest is.’ In the meantime, I will be calling the listing agent to see what’s happening and if we shouldn’t wait.”

## 2. Show you’re good for the money

Price, of course, is a paramount concern to sellers.

But sellers must also weigh whether a particular buyer will actually receive the mortgage he needs to actually purchase and pay the promised price.

Here, if a buyer exercises a little extra diligence working with a lender, he can reassure the home seller his financing is sound – and perhaps even beat out another, higher offer.

At a minimum, buyers should be “pre-approved,” not just “pre-qualified.” The latter means that a buyer lets a lender pull his credit history as well as gather information on his salary and job history, and savings.

Expect every viable buyer to be pre-qualified. Some lenders may go farther, however, and

“pre-underwrite” the loan, says Gibran Nicholas, CEO of the CMPS Institute, which certifies mortgage bankers and brokers.

By “pre-underwriting” a lender works with a buyer to secure all the information that can be supplied before there’s a specific home the buyer has put forth a purchase offer on, Nicholas says. For instance, when documents like bank statements showing a borrower built his savings for a down payment over a period of months, and his past few income tax returns can speed up processing once a home is selected.

Moreover, agents say some lenders will agree to call the listing agent to assure them that they have carefully reviewed the buyer’s mortgage application, and anticipate no problems.

A dose of realism, however: Know that despite your best efforts, you could lose out to a buyer who doesn’t need financing, but is paying cash.

Indeed, real estate investors looking to rent out a home buy most frequently in the \$100,000 to \$300,000 range, notes Daren Blomquist, senior vice president, ATTOM Data Solutions.

The best a first-timer can do to compete is to convey the certainty of his financing, and perhaps show he’s the only who will truly love the home.

## 3. Sweeten other provisions

Buying a home is a leap into the unknown. No one, particularly first-timers who may be on a budget, wants to deal with a broken water pipe or dying furnace.

That’s why it’s standard for a purchase offer to include an inspection contingency, whereby the buyer hires a professional to comb top to bottom, noting any and all defects.

It’s risky to not include this contingency.

“When you are buying a home there is often earnest money or due diligence fees,” notes Darrell Hess, a Redfin agent in Asheville, N.C., and that money could be lost

if you submit a contract without an inspection contingency, but pull out when serious flaws become apparent.

However, Trompeter says a buyer might stipulate that he’s willing to absorb the costs of certain projected repairs.

Moreover, a first-time buyer who has a month-to-month rental or a flexible landlord has an advantage over other buyers who must sell a place before closing the deal.

Stipulating that you’re able to close quickly, or conversely, wait until the seller wants to move, could move your offer to the top.

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Summit Pointe Builders, Inc. has been building their clients' dream homes since the 80s. There are many advantages to a custom build and Summit Pointe Builders, located at 3579 Memorial Highway, Suite 2, is here to help you with the process.

John E. Halbing, owner of Summit Pointe Builders' says his main job is to manage his clients' expectations to "create a home for their family that in 6 months to a year before they only dreamed about."

"We have a great team of employees and suppliers that all have that same vision," Halbing says. "Our mission statement is to exceed the needs of our customers by providing outstanding service and superior quality."

Halbing says he has been building homes for a little over 30 years and before that he worked with his father.

"I've done 8 communities in the Back Mountain," he says. "We've built well over 400 homes and we really develop personal relationships with our clients."

Summit Pointe Builders has been recognized twice as Builder of the Year by the Building Industry Association of Northeastern Pennsylvania. Along with that, Summit Pointe has been voted the Best Builder by Times Leader's readers for 6 years and counting.

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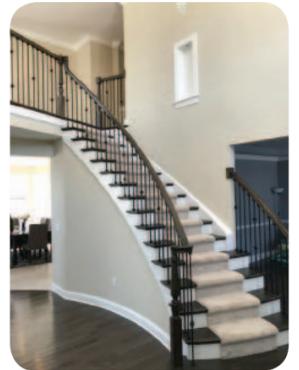
"We build homes as small as 1800 square feet up to homes that are up to 10,000 square feet," Halbing says.

Along with traditional style homes Halbing says Summit Pointe also focuses in building boat houses.

When asked for advice about choosing a custom home, Halbing says this, "when choosing a contractor - the importance is the continuity that a contractor has had over the past few years. Over 20 years, even 30 Summit Pointe Builders has had the same name, same phone number since the 80s and a lot of the same employees."

Halbing also says that Summit Pointe has "systems in place to help create an organized building process."

If you are interested in a custom home give John Halbing at Summit Pointe Builders a call at 570-675-7900.



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# Distinctive Properties

## Century 21



**910 Lantern Hill Road • Shavertown**  
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**MLS #17-2990 \$799,000**



A spectacular panoramic view from expansive windows on multiple levels is certainly an incredible sight! Exquisite brick home in Woodridge II on 3.2 acres offers a spacious eat in kitchen open to a large inviting family room. 3 Fireplaces, spacious multi level deck, built in pool and mature landscaping are included in this stately home.



**27 Carey Lane • Jenkins Township**  
**Listed by Ben Piccillo • (570) 474-6307**  
**MLS #17-3325 \$630,000**



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# A Decade of Cabinetry and Kitchen Décor

Chances are if you talk to your circle of friends, someone you know has made a purchase at Cabinetry and Stone Depot on Mundy Street in Wilkes-Barre.

The Wilkes-Barre Township business, which started off selling a few small cabinet lines, is now almost 10 years old, has more than a dozen cabinet lines and offers 30 different colors of granite.

"I try to get what people want," said Owner David Wong, pointing to the business' longevity.

Wong opened in August 2008, and is proud to have a loyal customer base, state-of-the-art showroom and prime location on Mundy Street in which to operate.

After working in the industry for a number of years, Wong decided to operate his own store, out of the space that previously housed EFO Furniture Outlet.

"We needed a large facility," Wong, 32, said. "We stock over 10,000 cabinets."

Back then, Wong didn't have as much competition and there weren't as many options from which to choose.

"I caused a lot of commotion with my high-quality products and good prices," he explained last week, in between taking customer phone calls and talking with store visitors in his 4,000 square-foot showroom.

His recipe for success is simple: be laid back.

"We have a very casual atmosphere here," he

explained. "It's a very no-pressure environment."

That, coupled with a few other factors, are what have contributed to the store's success.

In addition to the no-pressure environment, loyal employees – some of whom have been with Wong since opening – as well as staying on top of current trends, keep the operation thriving.

"We do a lot of volume," he said, explaining that he sells 25 kitchen sets and installs more than 70 countertops per month.

While Wong and his staff stay busy, they also remain flexible.

Wong is always listening to customer demand and catering to what's popular. That includes white and grey kitchen color schemes, which are currently all the rage, along with quartz and granite kitchen countertops.

"I like happy customers," Wong said, adding that the grateful phone calls he receives after his team does a new install give him great satisfaction.

With customers at the forefront, he's focused on continuing his strong business partnerships.

For example, when a customer needs appliances to fit into their new kitchen, Wong is quick to refer them to Rebenack's Appliance, where he knows they'll get the same kind of superior service.

"(Rebenack's) always take care of the customers," Wong said, smiling.

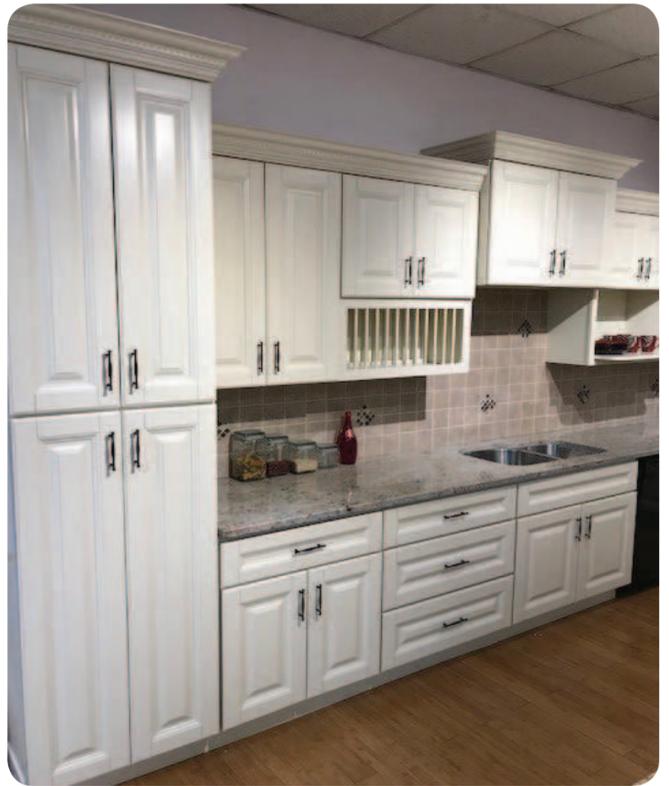
Despite working six days a week, Wong wouldn't want it any other way.

"I enjoy my work," he said. "I'm never off the clock really."

While Wong does a great deal of business in Northeastern Pennsylvania, he's also done install work as far as places such as Harrisburg and Edison, N.J.

Coming up, Wong is looking forward to the 17th Annual Home & Garden Show at Mohegan Sun Arena April 13-15, where he'll raffle off a free granite countertop.

He also expects to do a 10-year-anniversary promotion that will have a "wow factor," he said. To learn more about Cabinetry and Stone Depot, visit [www.cabinetryandstonedepot.com](http://www.cabinetryandstonedepot.com).



An off-white kitchen in the Cabinetry and Stone Depot showroom.



Cabinets and countertops make up a large portion of the business at Cabinetry and Stone Depot.

## IF YOU GO

**What:** Cabinetry and Stone Depot, LLC  
**Where:** 213 Mundy St., Wilkes-Barre Township  
**When:** 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. M-F; 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sat  
**Phone:** 570-208-8881  
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# Spring

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# Luxury Vinyl Tile Offers Home Owners Ease in Installation, Price and Much More

Luxury vinyl tile is a vinyl flooring product that looks like stone, ceramic or wood with a hard, easy to clean surface.

Mark Rubando of Giant Floor in Wilkes Barre, Scranton and Bartonsville says luxury vinyl tile is (and has been) a favorite flooring option for his customers.

“These vinyl floors give you the look of wood, tile, or stone,” Rubando says. “And they’re easy to clean.”

The benefits of luxury vinyl tile are endless. It’s made of a hard, vinyl material – the surface is the second hardest material (next to diamond) and there are different options for backing – a popular one being cork, which is made of an oak material.

There is less maintenance involved with luxury vinyl tile, compared to hard wood floor. Hardwood floor, if wet, will buckle, expand and contract as time goes on. Luxury vinyl tile is built to last.

“A lot of people are ripping up their carpet and putting these down,” Rubando says.

Another benefit of luxury vinyl tile is the price – they’re in the same range as most carpeting and can be installed as a weekend project. Rubando says all you’ll need is a utility knife, straight edge and a little elbow grease.

“If you were to try to do ceramic tile, it’d be a bear,” Rubando says. “Even installing wood floor, you need special tools.”

Luxury vinyl flooring can be easily accented and enhanced with an area rug, too. Giant Floor offers a variety of styles of carpeting and rugs and they can even be cut to suit the needs of your space.

Want to see some of your options? Visit [www.giantrugs.com](http://www.giantrugs.com) to see some of Giant Floor’s newest arrivals or to place a custom order.

Visit Giant Floor today – they’re located in Wilkes-Barre, Scranton, and Bartonsville. Check out their gallery online at [www.giantfloor.com](http://www.giantfloor.com).



Luxury vinyl tile has the look and feel of hardwood flooring, but is a fraction of the cost. Photo courtesy of [thespruce.com](http://thespruce.com).

## Factors to consider when choosing carpeting

When the time comes to choose flooring for their homes, homeowners may be overwhelmed by the vast array of options at their disposal. The choice between carpet and hardwood flooring, laminate or tile is a matter of personal preference. People have long extolled the virtues of hardwood flooring, but carpeting can be just as stylish and provides a host of other benefits as well.

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.

### Type of carpeting

There are many different types of carpeting, some of which are best suited to certain situations. For example, 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.

# Spring

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Distinctive Properties REAL ESTATE



# Dear Home Seller

Why a personal appeal could sway a seller

By Marilyn Kennedy Melia | CTW Features

When Jessica Chadie and her husband viewed a condo in Jersey City, N.J. last year, she remembers thinking, “The sellers are a couple just like us. We saw lots of baby stuff and wedding pictures. They were at the stage we want to be in a couple of years.”

So, would the sellers, who had several offers, be inclined to select Chadie and her husband as their buyer, because they also planned to make the condo a comfortable place to start a family?

It certainly was worth trying to convey that message, says Chadie, who, with husband Moussa Kamakate, composed a letter to the sellers telling them just that.

“I don’t know if it was the letter that was the one reason we [were selected],” Chadie says. “But I think it helped. I know that my cousin sold to people because of their letter.”

Letters do sometimes sway a seller, even if there are other offers with a slightly better price, say real estate agents.

But, because now the tight supply of homes on the market spurs buyers to do all they can,

it’s likely other buyers are also sending letters. To stand out, letters should be personal and specific, says Angie Lotz of RE/MAX All Pro in Bloomingdale, Ill.

Adds Lesley Lannan, a Redfin agent in Buffalo, N.Y., “I try to find out as much as I can about the seller’s circumstances, like whether this was a long-time family home or more of a short-term investment. That helps determine whether a personal letter from the buyers will have an impact.”

Lotz points to her client, Chris Caldwell, who wrote a letter explaining to a seller that they had been looking for a few years while living with his wife mother. During that period, Caldwell renovated her six-bedroom home himself.

When a home came on the market in Glen

Ellyn, Ill., a suburb that Caldwell and his wife had long scouted in for homes because of its excellent schools, easy train commute to downtown Chicago and charming homes, they got to work penning a letter on how much they wanted the property.

Armed with the knowledge that the owner of the home, built in 1999, was the original and only owner and had a strong connection to the house, Caldwell and wife, Julie, expressed that they would likely be long-time owners. And, conveying their long hunt and Chris’s renovation skills may have convinced the seller that they were determined, and would maintain and love the home.

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570-407-0794



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**Dave Kintner**  
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**Wonderful spacious & bright** home with so much to offer. Situated on 9.92 acres with pond in Springville Twp. Tons of natural light throughout, new carpet and paint so pack up and move right in. Home can be used as a single family home or have an in-law suite on one side. Basement can also be used as a rental if you should wish. 6 bedroom home with 4 baths, bath on right side is handicap accessible. So pack up your belongings and come enjoy the views from almost every room. **\$259,900**  
SC#18-911 **WB#18-1116**



**Look no further!** Here is your Dream Home! Lovely 3 to 4 bedroom home convenient to town and wonderful views of the Endless Mts. Very well maintained home, Master Suite on first floor, Living Room with Fireplace, newly appliance kitchen and lots of room to entertain. Nice rear deck to relax on and great covered side porch for your enjoyment. Partially finished basement allowing for possible 4th bedroom but still lots of extra living space and storage. Large 2 car garage and double lot! Home warranty included. **\$283,750**  
SC#17-4141 **WB# 17-4610**



**Location, Location, Location!** Lovely newly listed home in Shavertown/Trucksville Area. Located on a quiet street just off Carverton Road on Frangorma Drive. Just a couple miles from Francis Slocum State Park & Back Mountain Trails, 15 minutes to several Shopping Malls & Casino Complex while 30 minutes to Arena, Concerts & a Minor League Baseball Stadium. 3 bedrooms, 2 ½ baths, dining room with built in corner cabinets & recently updated kitchen. Family room leading to rear deck and above ground pool with decking. Gleaming hardwood and tile floors. Master bedroom suite with 2 walk-in closets and radiant floor heat in master bath. Full basement adding plenty of space for storage or finishing lower level. 2 car garage and circular driveway. Corporate Relocation. Call for appointment today! **\$254,900**

# Distinctive Properties

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**267 Huntsville-Idetown Road • Dallas**  
Listed by Rhea Simms • (570) 696-3801  
**MLS #17-3344 \$4,000,000**



Resting on 32 acres, this renovated 3 story Historic stone residence overlooks the Huntsville Reservoir. Mature landscaping envelops the 8500 sq ft main house. Minutes away from Huntsville Golf Course and many other popular attractions. A dramatic entry and staircase opens to a parquet floored living room with handsome bar and French door to stone patio.



**1523 West Eighth Street • Wyoming**  
Listed by Margaret Simms • (570) 696-3801  
**MLS #16-5547 \$1,350,000**



Rare opportunity. Inviting home on 100+ acres with spectacular, panoramic views. Beautiful hardwood floors flow through expansive, light filled living space. Stunning cherry and stainless kitchen has lovely breakfast area and walk in pantry. Huge Master suite with fireplace located on first floor. Large pool/patio area has outdoor kitchen. Combination field and woodland. Must see Virtual Tour!



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**EAGLE ROCK RESORT - HAZLETON**

**MOTIVATED SELLER!** Great 3 bedroom home with a large bonus room that could easily be a 4th bedroom or great man cave. Family room features a wood burning fireplace and sliding doors that lead to a large deck. The eat in kitchen has a large island with seating, all appliances are included. Home is on a quiet cul-de-sac. Would consider selling partially furnished. Quick closing possible.

**MLS# 17-5222 \$289,900**



**EAGLE ROCK RESORT - HAZLE TOWNSHIP**

Looking for a vacation retreat with a view? This is it! Stunning 5 bedroom, 5 bath log home. Large 2 story family room with a stone, wood burning fireplace and a great winter view of the ski slopes. Kitchen has s/s appliances and a gas fireplace. LL has a wet bar, bedroom & 3/4 bath.

**MLS# 17-6131 \$378,800**



**SAND SPRINGS COUNTRY CLUB - DRUMS**

Truly exceptional, CUSTOM home with amazing views! Dream kitchen with granite breakfast bar, stainless steel appliances, walk-in pantry. Huge living room with gas FP. 4 bedrooms, 3 full baths. Hardwood floors throughout. First floor office or bedroom. Luxury master suite with a 10'x10'8" walk-in closet. LUXURY master bath with slipper tub. 3 stall garage. Full basement. Two zone gas heat.

**MLS# 18-1011 \$392,500**



**EAGLE ROCK RESORT - HAZLETON**

Custom built McCarrie Home! Used as a vacation home since it was new. 4 bedrooms, one on the first floor with an attached home dramatic 2 story family room with stacked stone fireplace. HUGE kitchen with Terrazzo floors, upgraded granite & 42" high cabinets. Master bedroom has a see through fireplace into the master bath. Large corner lot. Will sell partially furnished with an acceptable offer.

**MLS# 17-5587 \$434,900**

## Distinctive Properties REAL ESTATE



# First-Timer's Right Loan

Find the best loan to finance your first home with this quick guide from mortgage experts.

By Carley Lintz | CTW Features

Buying a home for the first time is an exciting endeavor, but it's also a huge financial decision. The median home value was \$205,100 as of November 2017 according to Zillow. Unfortunately, most of us don't have that kind of cash on hand, so that's where home loans come in.

The process of choosing, applying for and obtaining a mortgage can be overwhelming, though, especially for first-time homebuyers. It's easy to get lost in the paperwork, financial terminology and types of loans, which is why it's important to have an experienced professional to guide you to the best loan for you.

"There are an array of loan programs that exist and can fit the various needs and desires of homebuyers. Every homebuyer situation is unique and there is no one size fits all when it comes to homeownership financing. A lender can help you explore mortgage options to help you make the best financing decision for your situation," explains Cerita Battles, SVP and Head of Retail Diverse Segments for Wells Fargo Home Mortgage.

Before you decide on a loan, you should first identify your goals and determine how much home your budget can handle. "Knowing where homeownership fits into your larger financial plan is important. Reflect on where your life is headed and what you want to accomplish along the way," says Kathy

Cummings, Senior Vice President of Homeownership Solutions, Bank of America. She recommends asking yourself:

- Would I need to make changes in my budget to buy a home?
- Will buying a home mean stretching to my financial limits?
- Would owning allow me to maintain my other savings goals and be prepared for potential home emergencies, like a new roof?
- What's more important to me: the opportunity to build equity over time or have stable housing payments?

The types of loans available to you will also depend on a number of factors, such as your credit profile, down payment amounts and income. Here's a breakdown of some of the most popular types of home mortgages available to first-time homebuyers:

## 1. Fixed-Rate Mortgages

These types of mortgages have a set interest rate for the entire life of the loan, typically 15 or 30 years, which means your monthly principal and interest payments will always be the same. "This offers you consistency that can help make it easier for you to set a budget," says Cummings.

This type of loan is great if:

- You plan on owning your home for an extended time period (7 or more years).
- Interest rates are likely to rise in the near future and you want to lock down the current rate.
- You prefer the stability of a fixed principal and interest payment.

## 2. Adjustable-Rate Mortgages (ARMs)

ARMs are loans with interest rates that adjust at a specific time and frequency (once a year, once every three years, etc.), so the amount you pay changes depending on the market. Typically, they provide a lower initial rate than fixed loans and after the first period is over, the rate will adjust to the market trends. This type of mortgage is generally considered riskier because your future payments are not guaranteed.

You may choose this type of loan if:

- You want to take advantage of lower initial payments to buy a more expensive home.
- You believe the market rates will decrease in the future.
- You expect to sell your home in a set time frame and therefore will move before you experience an interest rate change.

## 3. Government Loans

In addition to private loans, there are also government-backed mortgages available, such as a FHA loan or a VA loan.

A FHA loan is a mortgage insured by the Federal Housing Administration. They usually offer competitive interest rates, smaller down payments and lower closing costs than many private mortgages.

These loans are especially popular amongst first-time homebuyers because, if you have a credit score about 580, you may qualify for a down payment as low as 3.5 percent of the purchase price. However, you must also pay mortgage insurance premiums, which protect the lender if you default.

If you are an active-duty military member, veteran or surviving spouse, you may have access for a loan through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Since the VA guarantees part of the loan, these loans usually feature competitive interest rates and no down payments. You also don't need to meet a minimum credit score and aren't required to pay private mortgage insurance.

© CTW Features

## Simple ways to cut mortgage costs

Monthly mortgage payments are the biggest single expense for many homeowners. So it's understandable why plenty of homeowners would love to trim those costs.

A host of factors determine how much homeowners pay for their mortgages each month. The cost of the home, the amount of the initial down payment and property taxes, which are often folded into monthly payments, will factor heavily into the cost of home ownership. While homeowners may feel as though there's little wiggle room to cut the costs of their mortgages, there are several ways to do just that and potentially trim years from the life of a home loan.

### Make bi-weekly payments

Making bi-weekly instead of once-a-month payments can save homeowners substantial amounts of money. A year's worth of once-a-month payments equates to 12 payments per year. But homeowners who pay on a bi-weekly basis will make 26 half payments, or 13 full payments, per year. That extra annual payment can be applied directly to the principal, dramatically reducing how much homeowners pay in interest over the life of their loans.

### Stop paying PMI

Homeowners whose initial down payments are less than 20 percent

of the sale price will have to pay private mortgage insurance, or PMI. But once the balances on such mortgages falls below 80 percent, homeowners can cancel such insurance. Homeowners may also be able to stop paying PMI by having their homes reappraised.

### Refinance the loan

Refinancing a loan also can save homeowners substantial amounts of money each month. Homeowners are typically eligible for lower interest rates when refinancing their loans, meaning they will pay less in interest each month. However, refinancing is not free, so homeowners should first check the going home interest rates and examine their credit scores to see if the interest rate they're likely to get upon refinancing will save them money. The cost of refinancing might be more than homeowners can save.

### Request a tax reassessment

Real estate values increase and decrease, and homeowners who feel their homes have decreased in value can request that their homes be reassessed. Homeowners whose homes are assessed at a value lower than the current value can expect to pay less each month in taxes.

Homeowners hoping to cut mortgage costs have various options at their disposal.

# Distinctive Properties

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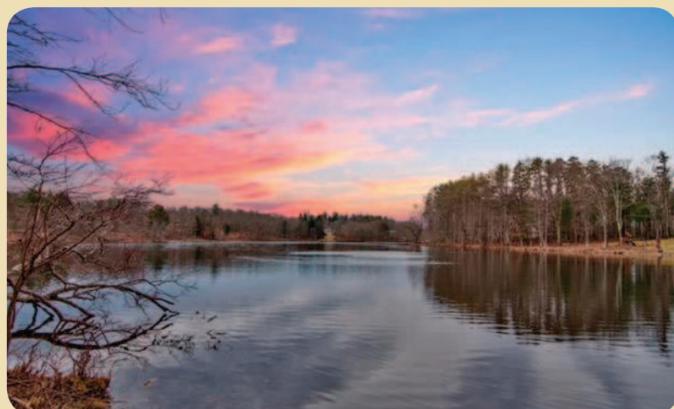
2553 State Route 92 • Falls  
Listed by Judy Rice • (570) 288-9371  
MLS #17-4154 \$949,900



Exquisitely crafted Mansion and Carriage House built in the 1920's. Walnut staircase, flooring, marble arches, stained glass and antique lighting fixtures. Ideal for winery, B&B or corporate retreat. Additional info MLS# 17-4155 additional taxes \$5,488. The Carriage House with apartment are included in the sale.



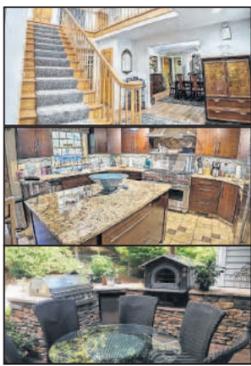
6 Cutters Lane • Mountain Top  
Listed by Lisa Joseph • (570) 474-9801  
MLS #18-0898 \$624,900



This grand lake front home is set upon 2.71 private acres in the Ice Lakes! Many attractive features and upgrades include a first floor Master Suite with private patio doors to deck; a 2 story family room with an abundance of natural light overlooking the lake and patio doors to rear deck; extra-large kitchen with patio doors to the screened-in covered porch also overlooking lake; 3-car garage and much more!

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Direct: 570.696.0875 Cell: 570.690.3327  
JILL A. HISCOX Real Estate

**DALLAS**



You can see Huntsville reservoir from this private estate-like setting. Featuring a gourmet kitchen, a 2 story family room, and recently updated baths. The back yard provides a private escape with a gorgeous in-ground pool and a top of the line out-door kitchen for entertaining. The oversized front porch is covered allowing you to sit and enjoy your view no matter the weather!

MLS# 16-5913 Asking \$638,000

**KINGSTON**

**SHICKSHINNY**



If you need lots of space or an in-home office, this is the one for you. Beautiful classic 3 story with original woodwork and built-ins on a pretty tree-lined street close to everything you need. Home office with a separate entrance & powder room. Second floor features 4 huge bedrooms and the third floor is currently a master suite with walk-in closet. One car detached garage, fenced yard.  
MLS#17-5193 \$189,618

**DALLAS**



Picture perfect 4 bedroom home. Peaceful setting on one acre property. Mint condition. Large kitchen w/ hardwood floors, wood burning fireplace, beautiful front porch, large deck.  
MLS#17-5395 \$249,000

**SHAVERTOWN**



MLS#17-2564 \$474,000

**DALLAS**



MLS#17-2253 \$417,000

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**PITTSSTON**



This 3 year old townhouse is loaded with quality upgrades. Spacious luxury end unit w/2 car garage. Ultra modern kitchen w/granite tops. Tile bath. Walk-out basement. Beautiful view.  
17-5766 \$280,000

**SHAVERTOWN**



Bright & Airy 2 story house set on 2.4 private acre lot. FR with 2 story fireplace - Hardwood Floors flow through 1st floor. 4 BR Recently remodeled master bath - Kitchen with center island and eat in area - 4 season room leads out to beautiful grounds - Circular driveway. 3 car garage 18-857 \$359,900

**SHAVERTOWN**



Hillbrook Farms - Impressive 2 story home set on private 4 acre lot features Family room with cathedral ceiling, gas fireplace, built-in entertainment center - Spacious 1st floor master bedroom suite - Formal dining room - Bright eat-in kitchen with large center island and granite counters - S.S.appliances. Deck with Hot Tub. 17-6382 \$460,000

**SHAVERTOWN**



Meticulously maintained this 3 story home sets on 1.7 acre lot. Kitchen w/Quartz countertops, 2 story family room w/stone fireplace w/dramatic windows. 3rd floor bedroom suite/bath, freshly painted throughout. LL finished w/projection screen. Perfect for entertaining. Whole House Generator.  
18-596 \$480,000

**SHAVERTOWN**



Convenient location in prestigious Slocum Estates - Custom built 6 year old 2 story w/master bedroom on 1st floor - Open 2 story family room w/gas fireplace- Hardwood floors, 6 bedrooms 4.5 baths - LL finished w/movie theater. Walk out basement to professionally landscaped yard w/privacy fence - Whole house generator - 3 car garage. A must see property.  
18-1000 \$509,900

**SHAVERTOWN**



Stunning describes this impressive 2 story w/views from every room - Architectural design which features gourmet kitchen w/patio doors out to deck. Custom design charcoal outdoor fireplace on deck. Office w/built-ins, finished LL w/2nd kitchen, FR w/French doors out to rear yard - 4 car garage - LL can be separate living quarters.  
17-1732 \$659,000

## Distinctive Properties HOME IMPROVEMENT



# Out With the Old, In With the New

2018 is well underway – time for these 5 decorating trends from 2017 to be replaced

By Erik J. Martin | CTW Features

In the world of home design, there's no dirtier word than *passé*. It's a term that signifies something is past its prime and destined for the dustbin of *décor* history (or at least for a few years until it probably comes back in vogue).

Now that 2018 is full steam ahead, many home interior experts are eager to suggest fresh and exciting ways for homeowners to reimagine their living spaces. Problem is, many of their clientele are still smitten with design trends that were all the rage last year. It's time to move on, say the pros.

"Trends come and go quickly because people's tastes change," says Tracy Stern, founder of New York City-based T&T Design. "It's important to replace outdated styles in your home so that you feel inspired."

There's another essential reason to keep up with the latest home design drifts, too.

"For the resale value of your home to stay on par, it's crucial to keep styles and *décor* current," Matthew Rosenberg, owner of M-Rad Architecture and Design in Los Angeles, says.

And no better time than the present.

"I like making changes at the beginning of the year, because it means starting the year fresh and new," says Michael A. Menn, architect/principal with Northbrook, Ill.-headquartered Michael Menn, Ltd. He adds that it's never too late to make a New Year's resolution to update key areas of your home.

Here are 5 decorating trends that should have died when 2017 expired, and 5 better ideas for 2018:

**Out** – white walls. Both Sherwin Williams and Benjamin Moore select shades of white for their "color of the year" in 2016, and the inclination toward ivory continued into 2017. "But once there's no color to look at on the wall, you have to find interest elsewhere. Now, this look has become too impersonal," says Mandy Straight, a Denver-based interior designer.

**In** – intense color. "We're done playing it safe – we want something that makes us excited," says Straight, who cites 2018 paint color of the year



White walls are so 2017. This year, intense, vibrant colors are in, such as Behr's 2018 Color of the Year, In The Moment.

choices by Pantone (18-3838 Ultra Violet), Sherwin Williams (Oceanside SW 6496) and Benjamin Moore (Caliente AF 290) as proof that consumers crave more vibrant hues.

**Out** – smart coffee tables. "A coffee table was never supposed to be a catch-all that includes a fridge, charging stations and lights. They promote laziness and tend to look cheap and unattractive," Rosenberg says.

**In** – classic handcrafted wood coffee tables that showcase natural *décor* like a tabletop fountain. "Incorporating woods, stone and water provides a level of organic appeal," Rosenberg notes.

**Out** – brass accents. "Last year, homeowners went slightly overboard here. Too much brass can often look cheap when overdone," cautions Stern.

**In** – mixed metals. This year, "consider mixing metals, like oil-rubbed bronze and chrome fittings, to accent your home with a more sophisticated look," Stern suggests.

**Out** – linen. "I see it sticking around as a staple," says Straight, "but this lead singer has been demoted to backup dancer as we look for something with a little more showmanship to offer."

**In** – velvet. Unlike dry, basic linen, "velvet is like a great date that loves us back," Straight says.

**Out** – pink. Jennifer Adams, an interior designer in San Diego, says "hot pink, raspberry and bubble gum are fresh, youthful and fun colors, but are too overwhelming in large doses, such as on walls or major pieces of furniture."

**In** – lilac. "This hue is a newer, bluer version of the blush we've been seeing everywhere for the past two years, and we anticipate that it'll begin filtering into home *décor* very soon," says Erika Woelfel, vice president of color and creative services at BEHR in Santa Ana, Calif.

© CTW Features

Mixing metals is a great way to add character and depth to a house. These oversized chrome drawer pulls contrast between the gold patina mirror and shiny gold geometric vase, which pop on the verde malachite wallpaper. Image courtesy Francisco Aguila.



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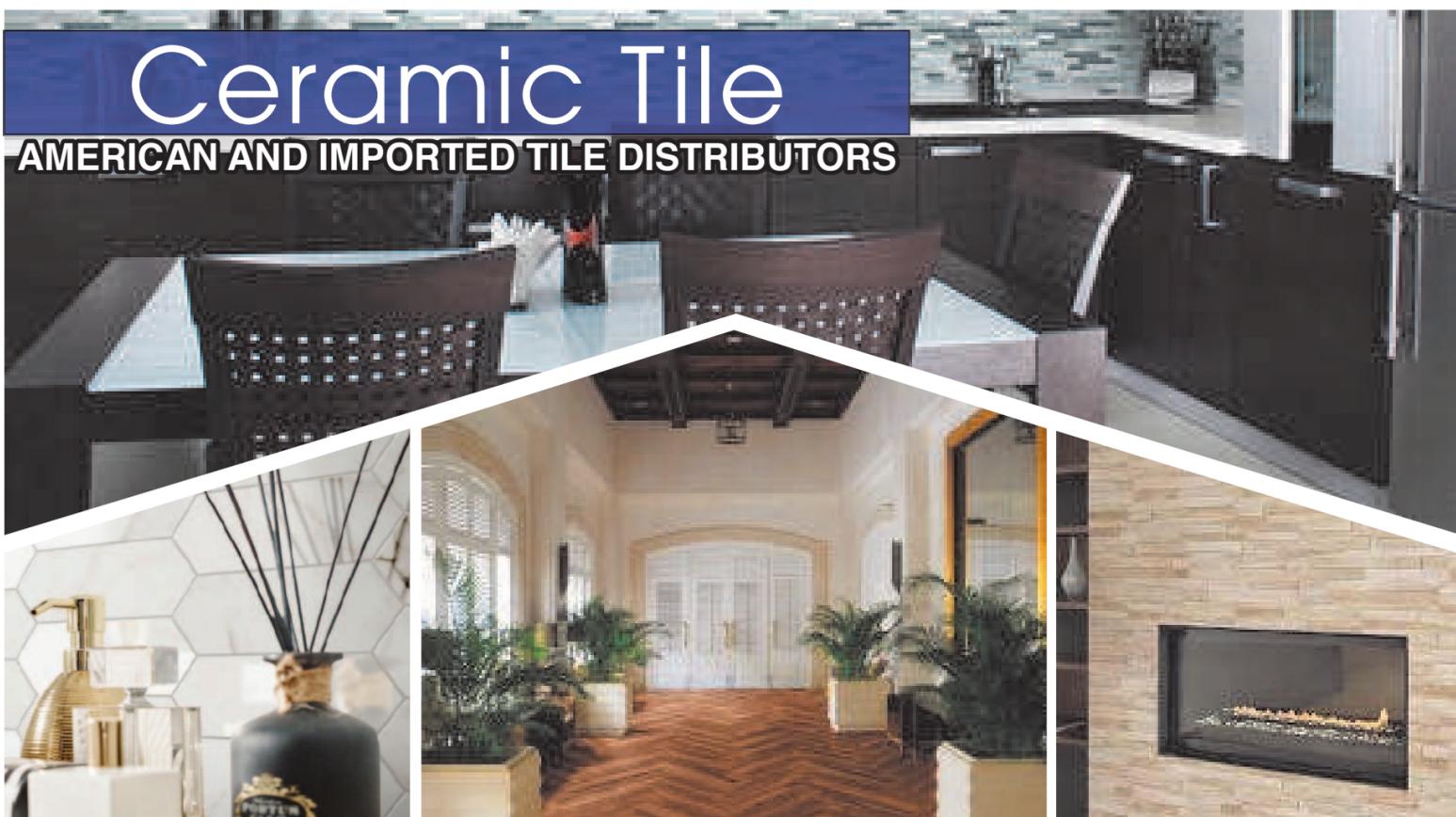


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## Distinctive Properties HOME IMPROVEMENT



# Landscaping for Unpredictable Weather

## How to landscape in an era of topsy-turvy weather

By Erik J. Martin | CTW Features

If you think climate change and extreme weather conditions have been tough on human beings, just imagine being stuck outdoors, naked to the elements 24/7. Such has been the lot of live landscaping staples like grass, trees, shrubs, plants and flowers, which have had to withstand the fury of Harvey, Maria, La Niña and other bullies in recent years.

Indeed, from extended droughts and blistering hot summers to 100-year floods and bomb cyclones, Mother Nature has created a lot of extra challenges lately for homeowners seeking a scenic setting across their yards.

"Landscaping has always been at the mercy of weather conditions, but it appears to have gotten more difficult in the past few years," says Ronna Moore, owner of Fairy Homes and Gardens in Savannah, Mo. "Climate change causes big global problems, such as rising sea levels, increasing air and sea temperatures and extreme weather, but it is also causing challenges in the yard."

Case in point: Japanese beetles, which benefit from higher carbon dioxide levels and warmer winters, recently decimated Moore's red veined alder trees and stripped the leaves off her variegated porcelain berry vines.

Jon Feldman, owner of Nyack, N.Y.-based G. Biloba Gardens, says changing environments have disadvantaged what were previously flourishing species by making them more vulnerable to disease.

"Also, non-native, invasive plants spread more rapidly and can choke out ornamental shrub beds. They generally have less water requirements than native species, allowing them to survive extreme drought conditions. On the opposite end of the extreme weather cycle, flooding can cause erosion of top soil, depleting the available supply of nutrients that ornamental plants need in greater quantities than invasive species," Feldman says. "Shrubs, perennials and annuals particularly suffer."

Angie Hicks, founder of Indianapolis-headquartered Angie's List, says even the most resilient plants have their limits.

"Hardy plants have the ability to survive cool temperatures and frost, but they aren't invincible against extreme heat, wind and other conditions," she says.

For all these reasons, homeowners now have to put more thought and planning into landscape design, "from the materials they use to the plants they plant," Hicks adds.

Your defense against the elements starts with choosing sturdier botanical breeds whenever possible. These can include wild geraniums, oregano, chives, poppies and daffodils, suggests Hicks.

Other worthy candidates are drought-resistant species like Lewisia, Angelina sedum, red bird of paradise, blue star juniper, Russian sage and yellow alyssum.

Another best practice: go native.

"Plant species that are indigenous to your specific area or region," recommends Cassy Aoyagi, president of FormLA Landscaping in Tujunga, Calif. "Native plants have spent millions of years adapting to thrive in your soils and climate and will have the best chance of adapting yet again, requiring no chemical fertilizers or pesticides and much less fuss."

In addition, think twice about planting species that could lead to a lot of toil and regret in these times of extreme weather fluctuations – including arborvitae, white pine and birch trees.

"With more humid and wet weather, fungus becomes a greater issue than in decades past. For that reason, I am not a fan of roses, which require fungicides and other

chemical applications to retain their aesthetic appeal," Feldman says.

Plan on better plant protection, too.

"If you predict that harsh sun or heavy rains will become problematic, place your plants nearer to your home or other greenery to help protect them. Also, consider adding an overhead canopy above prized plants or an outdoor heater on your patio to take the chill off plants positioned there," advises Missy Henriksen, vice president of public affairs for the Fairfax, Va.-based National Association of Landscape Professionals. "Apply fresh mulch around trees and planting beds, as well, which can help them retain moisture and survive during drier seasons, prevent weeds and supply nutrients back into the soil."

Many mulch materials are on the market, including peat moss, gravel, shredded hardwood, and pine nuggets; if you're not sure which is best for your needs, consult a landscape professional, Henriksen adds.

When shopping for plants at a gardening center or other retailer, read the fine print carefully.

"Do not choose plants that are borderline hardy in your zone. Read the labels and follow the planting instructions," Moore says.

If you cherish plants and lawns that require more consistent watering, consider investing in an underground irrigation system.

"If plantings are large enough, this is essential to maintain their health and appearance for years, although it's a significant added cost," Feldman notes.

Lastly, remember that no garden, lawn or yard is 100 percent invulnerable to the ravages of extreme weather.

"Homeowners can do everything they can to plant the right species and use the most durable materials, but weather can be so unpredictable," Hicks says. "Keep in mind, also, that all plants require some maintenance at some point."

And a foliage facelift from time to time, too.

"When plants become overgrown or too large for their location, a change is probably necessary," Henriksen says.

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To help protect your plants from unpredictable weather patterns, it is best to properly apply mulch and place plants near your home or other greenery. Image courtesy Grunder Landscaping, Miamisburg, Ohio.

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## Distinctive Properties SPRING HOME & GARDEN



# Spring Refresh

With spring well on its way, it's time to say goodbye to all that is gray and dreary. Our focus now is on welcoming the fresh air and bright colors.

Spring is a time for new beginnings, and everything is in bloom. Why not have your home follow suit? Here are a just a few inexpensive ways to freshen up your home decor for the new year.

### Think Lighter

Say so long to heavy drapes and thick throws. You can do a lot to brighten up a room by changing out your linens.

Introduce throw pillows in pastel colors and exchange the chenille for a soft cotton throw. Open up those heavy drapes, give them a good dusting and allow the sunshine to warm the room.

The lighter and brighter a room becomes, the more like spring it will feel.

### Bring in Fresh Flowers

Whether you pick up a fresh bouquet at the supermarket or potted ferns are more your style, there is nothing like adding a little greenery to liven up a room.

Bringing a little piece of nature indoors will help connect the inside of your home to all that is blooming outside.

### Change Up Your Art

The most important feature when it comes to choosing art is sticking with what makes you happy. Choose pieces that give you joy while giving your space a whole new look.

Even changing out your photos for newer ones or snapshots from vacation can update your space in a hurry.

### Declutter

Winter brings with it an influx of decor for the holiday season. While that extra cheer is welcomed in the colder months, that same decor can begin to feel oppressive once the seasons begin to change.

Spring is the time to take inventory of your things — store holiday decor, go through the stacks of magazines and put away items from other areas of the house that have migrated into your main living space. Make everything new.

# Mulch, Mow, Weed and Grow

## Tips for hiring a local lawn service

By Lisa Iannucci | CTW Features

Spring is right around the corner and that means it's time to haul the lawn mower out of the garage each and every week for your weekly landscaping chores. Wait, maybe not this year. Maybe this is the year that you finally hire a lawn service to take care of that grass for you. Then you can spend that time barbecuing with your family, catching a movie or finishing up some other chores that you've been wanting to do.

If the idea of handing over the mowing responsibilities to someone else sounds exciting, here are some tips on finding the right lawn care service for you.

### 1. Use an app

Finding the right lawn care company may be as simple as using an app. "All you have to do is put in what you want done — for example, mowing your lawn twice a month — and local lawn companies bid on your job," says Nathan Fink, owner of MW Mowing in Nashville. "You hire them, the job gets done and that's it."

Fink recommends using an app such as Plowz and Mowz, Greenpal and Takl. "Most check out the services that sign up and make sure they are legit and have insurance," he said.

Some apps require that the lawn care company send you a photo when they are finished.

### 2. Ask a neighbor

If you don't want to use an app or if the apps do not service your area, then ask your friends or neighbors who they use. "We like when our clients are all in the same area, so you might even get a good price because it helps the company," Fink says.

The National Association of Landscape Professionals also offers a directory of landscape professionals in your area.

### 3. Find a full-service company

"Hire a company that offers other gardening services besides lawn mowing and care," says Pol Bishop, a gardening and landscaping expert with Fantastic Gardeners, which is part of Fantastic Services, an international company with branches operating in the U.S. "They'd have more knowledge on maintenance, different types of turf and what kind of care they need."

If it's a company that specializes only in lawn care and mowing, that is all that they will be able to do for you, so if you need other work done, such as pruning trees, you will need to hire someone else. "Tree surgery requires a different type of knowledge and equipment, so it's

better to look for a company that offers a wide range of gardening services besides lawn care," Bishop says.

### 4. Look for certification and insurance

Lawn care certificates vary by state and you can find out your state's requirements by visiting their Department of Agriculture website. "Companies that offer lawn care and gardening services must have a pesticide application certification, must be certified by the National Association of Landscape Professionals and have a certificate they are qualified to perform any type of gardening service they offer," Bishop says.

Every company must ensure the safety of its employees, so make sure the company has workers compensation and liability insurance. "If they are mowing and hit a rock and something happens they need to be covered," said Fink.

### 5. Check reviews and equipment

The only way you will know if the company you choose is good and reliable is to check out their previous work and any online reviews about them. "Photos of previous projects and detailed information on their website is also a plus," Bishop says.

If you are interested in hiring your neighbor's lawn care company, then simply look at their lawn. "Also take a look at the quality of the lawn care company's equipment," Fink says. "The big orange equipment is top-of-the-line, so if they are using that, they know what they are doing."

### 6. Compare

Don't rush to pick the first company that responds to your post on the app or an ad. "Instead, compare rates and services they offer," Bishop says. Keep in mind that how often a company mows your lawn will depend on your location's climate.

Once you've hired a company, Fink tells homeowners to let them do their job. "Don't feel obligated that you have to come out and talk to us each time we are there," he said. "It's nice, but it actually puts us behind schedule."

A beautifully manicured lawn makes your home look good — there's that curb appeal. Not having to mow it yourself makes you feel good. The right lawn mowing service can make the entire process an easy one.



## Getting to know succulents

Succulents can be just what indoor or outdoor gardens need. Even though succulents are becoming more popular, there are still some people who are unaware of their attributes. By learning more about succulents, people may become devotees of these unique plants.

The word "succulent" brings to mind juicy, savory foods. But succulents aren't meant to be consumed. In fact, they get their mouth-watering name from their uncanny ability to store water in fleshy stems or leaves. That means they do not require frequent watering like other plants might. Succulents also may prove more durable in the face of drought and are a handy plant for forgetful gardeners or those who travel often and want something more hands-off in their gardens.

According to the succulents resource Succulents and Sunshine, most succulents prefer warm temperatures and are not very cold-tolerant. However, there are some varieties that can survive freezing temperatures. Still, for most succulents, it's best if they are kept in warm, moderately sunny conditions. The DIY Network says succulents grow best in bright light, but not always in full, hot sun.

Succulents also may attract gardeners thanks to their diverse looks. Better Homes & Gardens says that color variations of succulents are quite varied and include green, yellow, burgundy, white, blue-green, pink, red, and variegated combinations. Their shapes can be just as diverse, with many having pointy, rounded, spiky, or ruffled leaves.

People may be particularly familiar with one type of succulent: cacti. These traditional desert-dwellers are prized for their water-retention abilities, but some seem downright scary with their prickly exteriors. While all cacti are succulents, it's important to note that not all succulents are cacti. Less needle-like succulents include aloe, jade, snake plant, and agave. Hens and chicks (sempervivum) and wax plant (hoya) are other succulents to consider.

Searching for succulents online is another great way for gardeners to discover these wonderful plants.

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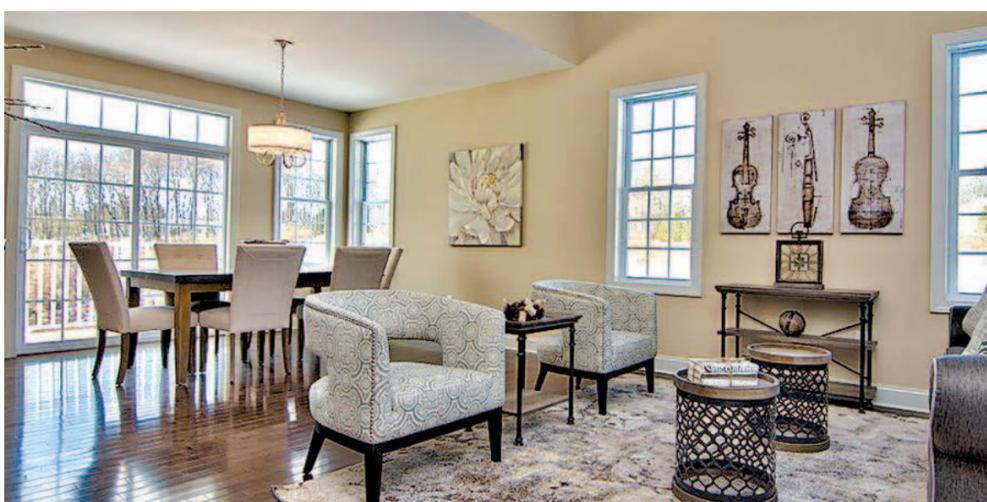
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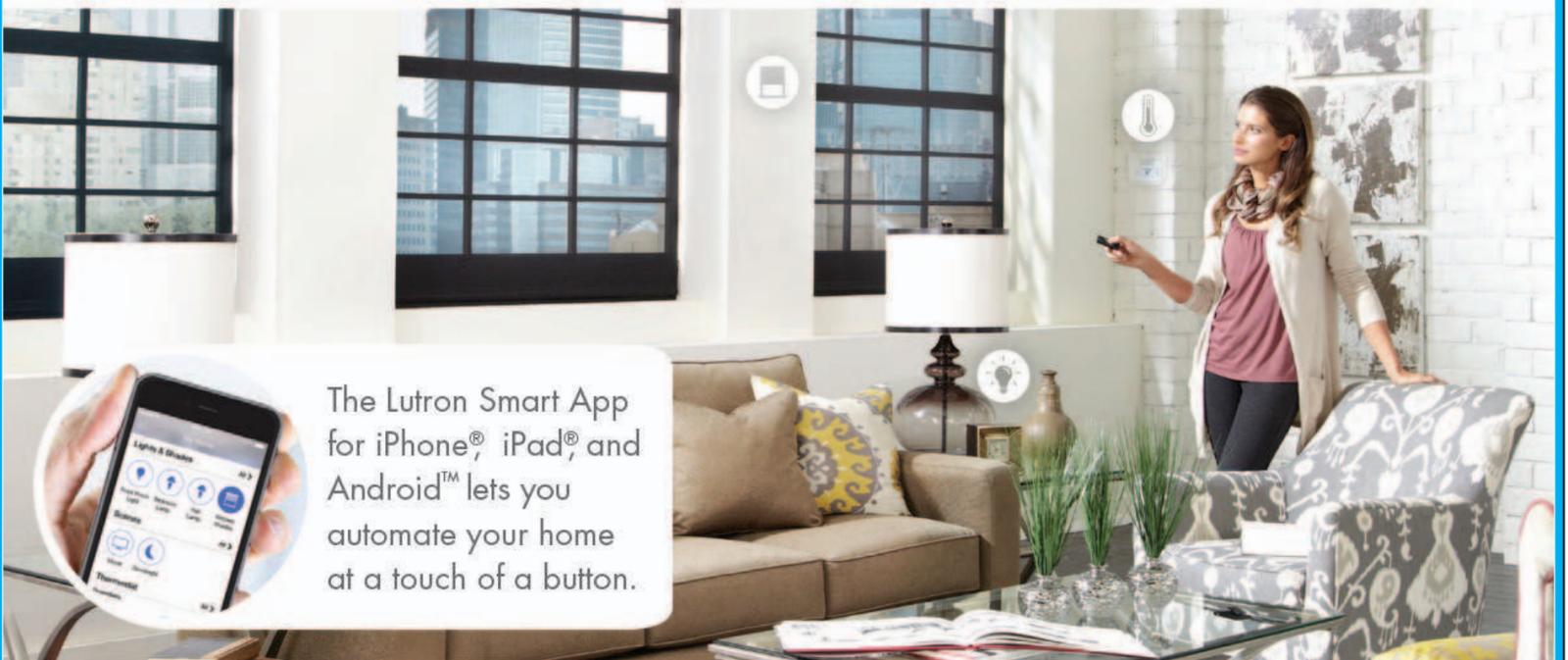


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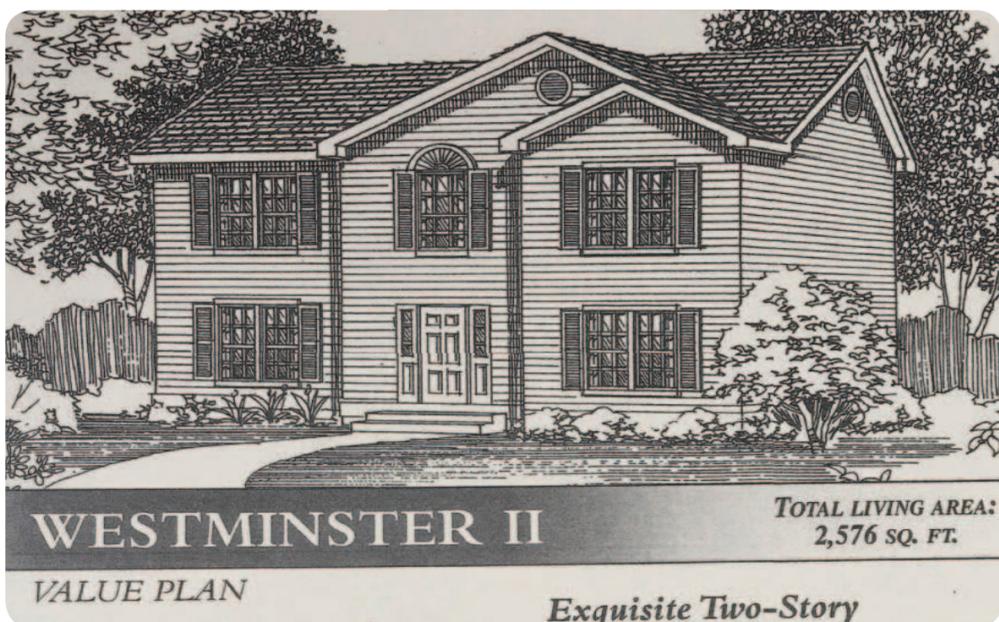
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# Distinctive Properties SPRING HOME & GARDEN

## Dress Up Your Windows

Windows are major players in home design. How they are dressed and framed from the exterior lends to the curb appeal of your home. Keeping them clean and dressed with drapery inside will affect the overall mood of a room and how much natural light a room receives. All of this is to say don't ignore your windows.

### Adding or Repairing Shutters

Shutters add so much to the curb appeal of your home. Making sure yours are in good shape is a worthwhile investment.

Each year, inspect your shutters. Do they need a new coat of paint? Are they secured properly with no loose screws? If your home lacks shutters, consider adding them. There are few architectural styles that shutters work against, so be sure to consult with your local window and gutter installation company.

### Dressing Window Boxes

If you have window boxes, spring is the ideal time to clean them out and prep them for foliage. Swing by your local hardware store or nursery and choose annuals with lots of color to fill them.

If you do not currently have window boxes, consider adding them to the mix. Window boxes add texture and flare to the exterior of any home.

### Introducing New Draperies

If you recently replaced your drapes or love the ones you currently have, don't underestimate what a good cleaning will do for them.

Check the tags and see if yours are machine washable. If not, you may have to take your drapes to the dry cleaners. This trip will be well worth it when you see how much brighter they look rehung across your windows.

### A Good Power Wash

After a winter full of dreary weather and high wind chills, your windows are not at their peak performance when it comes to light.

Give them a good scrub inside before heading outside to hit up their exterior panes. If your windows are double-hung, this will be a much easier task. Always follow safety instructions on cleaning equipment, especially when you're dealing with glass.



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# Distinctive Properties SPRING HOME & GARDEN

## Change of Season, Change of Linens

We tend to shut our homes up during the winter months and perform our own version of hibernating.

And while we enjoy the cozy feeling this hibernation provides, it also can induce poor circulation of air and accumulation of dust and germs. Washing and changing out your linens is a necessary stage of spring cleaning.

Go through every room thoroughly, and be sure to wash any winter items before storing. By the end, your home will be a brighter, cleaner version of itself.

### Bedrooms

Say goodbye to all those heavy comforters, and welcome in light summer quilts. Changing out your bedding for lighter fabrics in an attractive print will go a long way toward freshening your bedroom.

Since spring can still be cool, keep a cozy but light throw at the foot of your bed. Not only does it make for an easy grab in the middle of the night, but will soften the look of your spring bedding.

### Living Areas

Think throws, pillows and draperies. Not only is it good to change out these items for their lighter counterparts, but it also is smart to begin storing excess.

Spring requires fewer layers, so start putting away what you know you won't use. Give your draperies a good wash and inspect your blinds.

Keeping a space clean and bright is the trick to a quick "freshen up."

### Kitchen Towels and Door Mats

These often are forgotten items that can have a major impact on the freshness and cleanliness of your home. Winter weather can be hard on door mats — both indoor and outdoor.

Replacing these with fresh mats will not only help keep the effects of spring showers out of your house but gives you the opportunity to introduce a spring design.

And don't forget those kitchen towels. After all those holiday meals, they've most likely been more than pulling their weight.

If you don't want to purchase new kitchen cloths, run your current ones through the wash with a good dose of bleach, and dry them with a few drops of your favorite essential oils.



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## Distinctive Properties **SPRING HOME & GARDEN**



# Spring Cleaning Checklist

Once spring weather hits, most people get the itch to dust out the corners and coffers for a truly fresh start to the New Year. But many homeowners focus their attention on the inside of their houses and ignore important maintenance on the outside. Consider the following updates to give your home a spring overhaul.

### Windows and Doors

Windows and doors are the most common places for leaks, which can allow hot summer air in and cooled air out. As you clean, look for cracks in the caulking and weather stripping. If you notice any fogging up of glass in windows or doors over the winter, this could be a sign that the weather seal has been compromised.

Look for damaged areas, especially near the gutters and foundation. Any openings are an invitation for water and small critters such as carpenter ants and termites.

Additionally, it is important to check over your roof — especially after a rough or particularly wet winter. Make plans to have any cracked or missing shingles replaced by a roofer.

### Air Conditioner Maintenance

Just as you (hopefully) serviced your furnace in the fall, it is important to give your air conditioner the once over before you need it.

This includes replacing the filter and checking hose connections. Performing this chore in the spring means you won't have any surprises come summer.

### The Garage

This is one "room" that gets ignored when it comes to our spring-induced zest for organization. In fact, 86 percent of Americans can't even fit their cars in their garage for all the stuff they store in it. It is time to reclaim the garage.

Gather up recycling and take it to your local center. Organize the items you've been saving for the garage sale you still haven't hosted and donate them. Grab a broom and give the garage floor a good sweep.

No matter what level of clutter your garage houses, odds are it could use some TLC.

### Exterior Walls, Roof and Attic

Do a perimeter sweep of the exterior of your home once all the snow melts away and you're sure the last frost has come and gone.

# Spring Garden Planning

This spring, plan your best garden ever — or maybe even your first garden ever. The first step to achieving a well-organized garden is planning. Here's what you need to know.

### Talk With Local Experts

If this is your first time planning a garden, consult with a regional garden-planting guide. You can find one at most hardware stores or nurseries.

If you are a seasoned pro, you probably are already familiar with the timing of your last frost, but you might find some new information by checking with your local professionals.

### Seeds Vs. Seedlings

If you are just starting out, seedlings are a safer option. There is no need for you to nurture seeds from infancy when you're trying to get a handle on your gardening strategy.

If you prefer to grow your own, start your seeds inside several weeks before your last frost date.

### Create a Worksheet

This is where you decide what you want to plant, how much of it you want to plant and which vegetables you want to plant next to one another.

Tomatoes, peppers, zucchini squash and lettuce are good vegetables for beginners. Don't forget to contact your local nursery to see what grows best in your area.

### Beginners: Choosing a Plot

Choose a location on your property that receives a lot of sun. Vegetables need at least six hours of direct sunlight each day to grow properly. You also need a space with good, loose soil.

If a large garden intimidates you, consider a raised bed. You choose the size and even create a separate area for each vegetable, only taking on what you want.

### Skipping the Veggies

You also could skip planting vegetables altogether and stick with herbs. Not only are they great for seasonal cooking, but they also smell fantastic and each has a unique beauty to it. Plant in beds or in pots. The choice is yours.





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**Jeanna L. Trapane, Realtor**



Jeanna Trapane was born and grew up in Shickshinny, Pennsylvania. She has lived and worked throughout the area. She is very familiar with all of Luzerne County and surrounding communities. She became a REALTOR in 2016 and began her real estate career working with Realty World Masich & Dell in Berwick. Jeanna recently joined TradeMark Realty Group in Wilkes-Barre.

Jeanna has extensive customer service experience, having worked for Geisinger Health and Cigna Health Insurance. Jeanna is also currently working at Riverside Rehab in addition to servicing her real estate clients. She is committed to finding her clients a home, land or rental property that suits their needs. Jeanna understands the importance of listening to

her clients and assisting them through the home buying and selling process.

In her spare time she is a member of the Womens Auxillary for the American Legion Post 697 of Harveys Lake. She has two daughters active on the Northwest Area Softball team. Jeanna enjoys spending time with her family and walking her dog April.

Jeanna is committed to her clients and creating a positive buying or selling experience for them. Call Jeanna Trapane of TradeMark Realty Group today at 570-956-2067.



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4,500 sq. ft. of living space inside this beautiful Brick Center Hall Colonial home. There are 5 bedrooms with 3 bathrooms, large kitchen, breakfast nook, formal dining room, large spacious rooms. The floor plan flows seamlessly. Nothing to do but move in and make new memories. Master bedroom with en suite. Fully finished lower level, plus an awesome back yard area.

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## Distinctive Properties SPRING HOME & GARDEN



### Exterior Upgrades With a Money-Back Guarantee

Which home updates will pay off when it's time to sell?

By Lisa Iannucci | CTW Features

Are the kids out of the house and you're ready to downsize? Maybe you want to stay put and simply desire an upgrade that will pay off down the road. Whether now is the time to stick your 'for sale' sign in the grass or you want to remodel for your benefit, take a good hard look at the outside of your home. What would a potential buyer see? If your home is more fixer-upper than move-in ready, it's time to spruce it up, but where should you put your money that will get you the biggest bang for your hard-earned bucks?

"Most interior or exterior fix-ups are first done out of necessity and then done to improve your home's curb appeal," said Texas designer Pablo Solomon.

Updating the natural curb appeal of your home could mean up to a 120 percent return at resale, 20 percent more than the initial investment, according to Kayla Hein, creative director of Modern Castle in Ludlow, Mass. "Being the first thing that a potential buyer sees, the exterior is a worthwhile place to drop some cash."

Hein said that when renovating your home's exterior, there are two areas where your money can go – into the house or into the landscape. "It's amazing what a fresh coat of paint and some new door hardware can do for a home's exterior," she says. "It could also be as simple as freshening up existing beds with bright annuals and fresh mulch. With these quick fixes, you could expect up to a 200 percent return, receiving back twice the amount that you initially put into the project."

You may also want to consider adding interesting elements like cedar planter boxes, accent shutters or new light fixtures to highlight special areas of the home's exterior. "Something like this should yield 150 percent return from the initial investment," Hein says.

Is your home hidden under natural overgrowth, such as trees, vines, or shrubs? "Be sure to remove those so the house stands out," Hein says. "This is a simple fix, typically with no actual costs, but getting a buyer in the door can sometimes be the hardest part."

You can immediately improve your home's curb appeal by eliminating your old worn front door and replacing it with something more attractive. "Say goodbye to an old wood or steel door and say hello to a new steel entry door," says Rhianna Miller, home and garden improvement expert at Rubber Mulch. "It may be hard to believe, but the single largest ROI comes from an entry door replacement. You'll recoup around 90 percent of the \$1,400 you pay for the door."

What other projects have a high ROI? According to Remodeling's 2018 Cost vs. Value Report, projects such as a backyard patio and the addition of a deck actually recoup less money this year than they did

last year. For example, a backyard patio costs approximately \$54,130 and recoups only \$25,769, a 47.6 percent ROI. The addition of a composite deck can run home sellers around \$17,668 while only recouping \$11,239 or 63.6 percent of an investment.

"The important thing to understand is a deck, especially composite, is definitely a higher end addition that can run upwards of \$15,000," Miller says. "However, today's homebuyer is most likely looking for this element in their future home."

The good news though is that the addition of a wood deck – a \$10,950 project – can recoup a whopping 82.8 percent of the costs. What other projects have a high ROI?

#### 1. New garage doors

"Older garage doors can be a real eyesore," Miller says. "They typically lack proper insulation and other modern qualities. A new garage door will run approximately \$2,000 and you can look forward to a 77 percent return."

#### 2. New roof

Replacing a roof dropped in recouping its costs in Remodeling's survey, but if yours is really in need of patching, you may want to consider a full replacement. The last thing a potential buyer needs to see is worn shingles that cause leaks when it rains. "A new, well-maintained roof protects an entire home from weather damage," Miller says. "The new roof can also vastly improve your home's curb appeal and is often something that prospective buyers will want inspected. A mid-range roof replacement will run about \$20,000, but the return on investment is upwards of 69 percent."

#### 3. Updated siding

"Outdated, faded siding will bring down your home's value at an alarming rate," Miller says. "The good news is that new siding will total about \$15,000 and the return on your investment is a whopping 76 percent."

For more substantial upgrades, like masonry repairs, Hein said that you can expect a 100 percent return. Basically, you're getting back the money that you would pay into the project," she says.

Of course, you may not have enough extra cash lying around to complete all of these projects, so choose the one that will fix the biggest eyesore and get that buyer to make an offer and sign on the dotted line.

© CTW Features

## Awnings can make outdoor spaces more comfortable

Many homeowners are eager to step outdoors upon the return of warm weather. Outdoor living spaces have grown in popularity as more and more homeowners embrace opportunities to entertain and lounge around in their yards.

Outdoor entertaining areas can be great, but such spaces may go unused when summer sun makes it uncomfortable to spend time outdoors. But a retractable awning can change all that. Homeowners often find awnings can be worthwhile investments that can be beneficial both inside and outside of the home.

#### Increase usable yard space

Awnings can create privacy and establish boundaries for outdoor living areas. Place an awning over a deck, tables and chairs, or an entire patio area. Some people like to install awnings over a portion of their pools to provide shade for those who want to escape the sun's rays. Motorized awnings can be retracted with the push of a button, which can help homeowners with physical limitations.

#### Protect against sun damage

Awnings provide excellent protection against sun damage, as they can shield outdoor furniture from direct sunlight, helping to reduce the chances for dis-

coloration or fading.

#### Reduce air conditioning costs

In addition to shading outdoor living areas, smaller awnings can be placed over southern- and western-facing windows, shielding interiors against the sun's rays. In turn, this may reduce reliance on air conditioners.

#### Expand gardening possibilities

Some plants require very specific light conditions to grow. Awnings can protect shade-loving plants from harsh sunlight and filter the sun for plants that require indirect light. They can be placed over a patio container garden or permanent garden structure.

#### Add value for buyers

For those who may be selling their homes soon, awning may help them receive top dollar. Today's buyers want houses that have attractive and functional exteriors, and an awning can provide that competitive advantage over similar homes in the neighborhood.

When renovating outdoor areas, homeowners should not overlook awnings that can make outdoor living spaces more livable.





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