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HOMES



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Quick and simple ways to make a front door pop

Visitors' impressions of a home are often dictated by the home's entryway. Must as one may judge a book by its cover, the same can be said about the impression that a front door and entryway can create, regardless of how accurate that impression is.

Making certain changes to an entryway can go a long way toward improving curb appeal. Entryways also can set the scene for a home's interior. Whether one chooses to be classic or bold, modern or traditional, there are various ways to quickly transform a home's entryway.

■ **Bold front door color:** Color can dramatically enhance an entryway. Painting an existing door or replacing it with a more vivid option can do the trick. The DIY Network says certain colors stand out as favorites. These include

turquoise, yellow, red, indigo, orange, and black. The door color should complement the other shades of the home, such as those on siding and trim.

■ **Custom walkway:** Guide guests right to the front door with an attractive (and safe) walkway. Stamped concrete or decorative paver blocks may fit the bill. This walkway can extend to the street or to the driveway.

■ **Contain plants.** Landscaping around the entryway should be neat and well-tended. Overgrown plants or shrubbery may give off an air of neglect. Container plants and carefully curated shrubs can create a neat and inviting aura.

■ **Highlight the address.** Make sure the home can be found easily with bold and decorative house numbers. Consider two different address signs:

one illuminated and easily viewed from the curb, and another closer to the front door.

■ **Utilize high-end materials.** The relatively small area of real estate by the front door enables homeowners to splurge on more opulent materials that can really add a feeling of luxury. These can include colorful tiles, ornate planters, decorative wooden doors, or elaborate knobs and lighting fixtures.

■ **Add architectural details.** Find out which architectural elements will meld with the style of the home and then incorporate them. Moldings, columns, shutters, and trim are areas to consider.

The entryway to a home garners a lot of attention. Homeowners can enhance their spaces with entryways that really make a statement.



Entryways can set the scene for a home's interior.

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When relaxing and recharging away from home, the last thing vacationers want to think about is the safety of their homes and everything inside them.

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How to protect your home when you're away

Vacation often serves as a well-deserved break from the hustle and bustle of daily life. When relaxing and recharging away from home, the last thing vacationers want to think about is the safety of their homes and everything inside them. However, the National Council for Home Safety and Security and Statistics Canada estimate that more than two million burglaries occur in the United States and Canada every year. That underscores the importance of protecting your home at all times, including when you're not there.

■ Create the impression that someone is home. Just because you're heading off

for parts unknown doesn't mean you can't create the impression that life is carrying on as usual within the walls of your home. Smart home technology now enables homeowners to set timers on lights and even home electronics like televisions and radios. Homeowners also can ask neighbors to pick up their mail or halt delivery until they return from their trips. Nothing says "no one's home" as definitively as an overflowing mailbox.

■ Keep quiet on social media. A Credit Sesame survey of former burglars in the United Kingdom found that 78 percent acknowledged monitoring social media platforms such as Facebook and

Twitter as they try to find homes to burglarize. Individuals about to go on vacation should avoid sharing that on social media.

■ Stay silent while you're away as well. Social media silence should be continued while you're on vacation as well. No matter how tempting it may be to share photos from an exotic location, such posts could catch the attention of all the wrong people. A recent report from MetLife indicated that 35 percent of Americans between the ages of 18 and 34 check in from their locations via social media. That can alert criminals that no one is manning the fort back home.

■ Switch from a traditional lock and key to a

lockbox. Individuals who travel frequently can take a page from the realtor notebook and switch from a traditional lock and key lock system to a lockbox. Lockboxes require that a code is entered before a box containing a key can be unlocked. Homeowners who want this added measure of protection don't even need to put a key inside the lockbox, which typically covers a lock, making it extremely difficult for potential thieves to pick the lock.

Before leaving for vacation, individuals can implement various strategies and safety measures to protect their homes and their belongings while they're away.



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What to give new homeowners this holiday season

The real estate market has been a wild ride in recent years. Sellers have cashed in on record-breaking profits, and buyers have had to compete against many others sometimes in bidding wars for a limited number of properties. Once listed, homes are selling fast. As interest rates rise and inventory increases, things are likely to change, though for some it did not come soon enough.

Individuals who were lucky enough to find a new home this year may discover they now have little money to outfit those homes. Shoppers with new homeowners on their holiday shopping lists may want to help those loved ones outfit their homes this season. The following are some home-related gift ideas to get shoppers started.

- Video/smart doorbell:

Although the smart doorbell market began with only a handful of options, there's now a bevy of manufacturers who make video and smart home doorbells. These doorbells serve the dual purpose of alerting homeowners to someone at the door, while providing surveillance of the comings and goings outside of the home. Depending on the product, a subscription may be needed to access video history. Doorbells range from \$50 to \$200 and more depending on features and resolution.

- Furniture gift card: There's a good chance new homeowners will need to furnish new rooms in a home, particularly if they're coming from an apartment or a smaller place. Many people also like to update furnishings when they move into new places. A gift card to a popular furniture store



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Home-related gift ideas can be helpful for new homeowners on your list this holiday season.

- in the area will provide the head-start new homeowners need to secure sofas, dining sets, lamps, rugs, and more.
- Household tool kit: What better way to prepare new homeowners for the do-it-yourself projects and

Individuals who were lucky enough to find a new home this year may discover they now have little money to outfit those homes.

household repairs than with a tool kit? Home improvement retailers often package common tools needed in carrying cases or sets, but shoppers can grab separate items they think will be used and group them together into one gift. Pliers, screwdrivers, wrenches, a level, and measuring tape are good starter tools.

- Customized doormat: Give that new home additional curb appeal with a doormat customized with a special message or the new

homeowners' names, such as Welcome to the Smith Home. Other customizable products include cutting boards and wall plaques.

- Programmable thermostat: A programmable or learning thermostat will help new homeowners save on their energy bills. Many thermostats now pair with smart home systems and phones and automatically adjust the temperature as needed to reduce energy consumption.
- Linens: A high thread count sheet set or plush Turkish cotton towels may not be something new homeowners think to get for themselves. But these luxurious gifts can make life at home more comfortable.

Moving into a new home is an exciting yet expensive endeavor. Carefully curated gifts can tap into what new homeowners need the most.

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How to cut costs on home renovations

Do you still have an avocado green kitchen? Is your living room dank and dark? Perhaps there is only one bathroom for a family of six? Answering yes to any of these questions could serve as the catalyst for a home renovation project.

Home improvement projects come in all shapes and sizes — some with huge budgets and others that are more cost-conscious. Regardless of what homeowners hope to achieve with their renovations, a common goal across any price point is a desire to save as much money as possible. Home renovations can be expensive, but there are ways to cut costs.

■ Assess the merit of the project. Remodeling magazine annually publishes a “Cost vs. Value Report” that lists the average cost and return on investment homeowners can expect of various types of projects. If



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Home renovations can be expensive, but there are ways to cut costs.

you're planning to sell your home soon, it may be best to focus on repairs and renovations that will generate the most substantial ROI.

■ Hire a contractor. Even

avid do-it-yourselfers can sometimes benefit from a contractor's expertise, particularly for complex tasks. Don't waste money by trying tough jobs yourself;

rely on an experienced contractor who can get supplies for less money and will do the job right the first time. Compare bids from several different contractors and

figure out the best value.

■ Refurbish existing features. Rather than a complete gut and rebuild, figure out where you can revitalize existing fixtures and more. For example, refinishing existing cabinets can save you up to 50 percent compared with the cost of new cabinetry, according to Angi (formerly Angie's List), a cost comparison and business review resource.

■ Choose midgrade materials. Certain materials may be all the rage but they come with a higher price tag. Angi reports that granite counters could be \$60 to \$100 per square foot. However, a composite or laminate that looks like granite and wears well may be \$10 to 40 per square foot. Figure out where you can choose middle-of-the-road materials for maximum value.

■ Avoid peak seasons. You'll pay more to install a deck or a

pool right before the outdoor entertaining season. There also may be a premium to get work done right before a major holiday. Therefore, consult the calendar to find an off time for a renovation and book it then to save.

■ Do some prep work. You might be able to save by doing some of the demolition and preparatory work yourself. For example, you can tear up old carpeting before the installation of new tile floors. Perhaps you can mend and patch up walls before a paint job.

■ Buy a display item. Former showroom kitchens and baths often are sourced at a fraction of their recommended retail prices, according to Real Homes, a home remodel guide based in the United Kingdom. Retailers often update their displays and you may score existing showroom items at a discount.

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A beginner's guide to fall planting and maintenance

Spring and summer are perhaps the busiest times of year for gardeners. However, fall also is a prime time to tend to gardens.

The tree and bare root retailer Bower & Branch advises that soil temperatures in many regions of the country may still be warm enough to encourage root growth well into the start of winter. Furthermore, fall is often the ideal time to plant, fertilize and keep a garden going or to get a head start on next year's bounty.

Here are some tips to make the most of the fall gardening season.

■ Think about fall annuals and bulb planting. Near the end of September, start planting cool-weather-loving pansies and violas for pops of color as summer

flowers fade. Also, it's a good idea to stock up on bulbs that will bloom in the months to come before they sell out in stores. Wait until the temperatures really cool down before planting them in desired spots for spring sprouts.

■ Sow salad seeds. Lettuce, spinach, radishes, and arugula tolerate cooler temperatures. Try new and interesting lettuce varieties and enjoy salads well into the fall season.

■ Take inventory of the sun. Positioning a garden carefully means maximizing hours of sunlight, which begin to dwindle in the fall. Experts say gardens grow best in sunny locations that receive six hours of direct sunlight each day. This is where container gardens

can be helpful, as they allow gardeners to move plants into spots that will get ample sunlight.

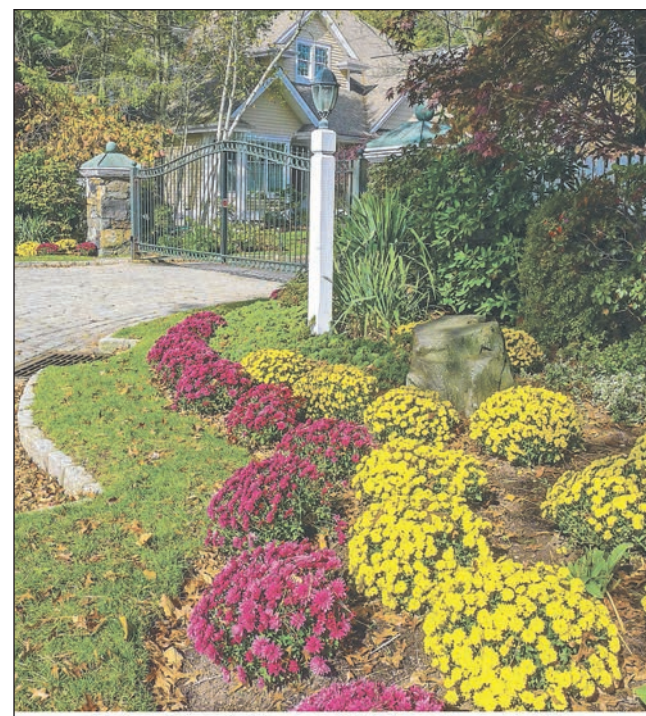
■ Fill in landscaping gaps. Some fall plants can add color around the landscape and brighten up homes to add curb appeal. In addition to pansies and violas, asters, kale and chrysanthemums are fall blooms. Keep in mind that mums can come back year after year. So take them out of those flower pots and get them into the ground. They can be enjoyed next year as well, sprouting in early spring and developing leaves and buds through late summer.

■ Clean up unwanted growth. Fall is an ideal time to cut back spent vegetable plants and get rid of errant weeds. Rather than bagging

leaves, mow them with a grass catcher and then add the mix to a vegetable garden as an excellent soil insulator. The nitrogen and carbon will fertilize the soil, enhancing growing possibilities and limiting weed growth.

■ Propagate plants in the fall. As temperatures gradually begin to cool, start taking cuttings from perennials, gathering seed pods from azaleas and rhododendrons and dividing hardwood cuttings, says the resource Gardening Know How. Consult with a garden center or horticulturist on the proper ways to propagate stems using rooting hormone and other techniques.

■ Continue to water plants. Water is essential in



COURTESY PHOTO

Here are some tips to make the most of the fall gardening season.

the fall and winter as roots can still be growing. Gradually reduce watering duration as plants go dormant.

Fall planting and

maintenance can extend gardening season and improve the chances of growing a healthy spring garden.



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Fireplace trends help create attractive, comfortable rooms

Fireplaces are useful features in a home. Fireplaces are sources of ambient heat and also add style to indoor spaces.

Fireplaces can complement just about any interior style. Fireplaces can be traditional and burn wood or connect to a home's natural gas supply for on-demand ambiance. What's more, fireplaces may come in vented or ventless varieties, depending on homeowners' preferences and what is allowed by community building codes. That means a chimney or flue may not be needed — expanding the list of rooms where a fireplace can be installed.

Certain trends have emerged among fireplace fans in recent years. Here's a look at what's getting consumers fired up about these home decor elements.

■ **Minimalist style:** Many fireplaces are designed in neutral colors with minimal trim that directs focus on the fire and not the appliance. When the fireplace is not in use, it blends in with surroundings and will not compete for attention with other design



COURTESY PHOTO

Certain trends have emerged among fireplace fans in recent years. elements.

■ **Convertible fireplaces:** Homeowners can choose between open

or sealed fireplaces. A convertible fireplace enables homeowners to have the best features of these

options. A convertible fireplace can be converted to wood from gas, or the opposite, in as little as

30 minutes.

■ **Nature-inspired materials:** Natural stone continues to be a material of choice in fireplace surrounds. Light colors work well for a fireplace, and also fit with today's lighter color interior design preferences. Natural stone also works perfectly with both contemporary and rustic decor.

■ **Vintage fireplaces:** Vintage continues to be a buzzword in 2022, and the choice to go vintage also applies to fireplace styles. A room decorated in vintage elements can be complemented with a vintage fireplace or one designed to look vintage.

■ **Integrate into wall decor:** Fireplaces that are built right into a wall save space. One can have a television and a fireplace on the same wall. These types of fireplaces work well in modern home designs. Other fireplaces may be built into bookshelves or other wall features.

Fireplaces can improve the appeal of a home. Various trends are popular this year, making fireplaces highly coveted features.



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Pros and cons to open-concept homes

Open-concept homes have become increasingly popular in recent years. An open-concept home is one in which the rooms flow into one another with limited obstruction from walls or other barriers. According to the National Association of Home Builders, 84 percent of new single-family homes have fully or partially open layouts.

While they may seem like a new trend, open floor plans are anything but. Early American homes featured open, often one- or two-room units built around the central kitchen/hearth. This maximized warmth and functionality. Homes evolved as incomes grew, and soon homes had several smaller rooms with specialized functions.

What's old has become new again. However, before diving head first into a new home purchase or a big renovation to realize an open-concept dream, consider the pros and cons of this type of setup to determine if it's really right for you.



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Before diving head first into a new home purchase or a big renovation to realize an open-concept dream, consider the pros and cons of this type of setup.

Advantages of open floor plans

Open floor plans facilitate the flow of natural light throughout a space and can promote air flow, helping to reduce warm or cool pockets of air in otherwise

closed-off rooms.

Open homes make socializing easier, even when people are doing different things. While someone is cooking dinner in the kitchen, he or she can still interact with someone else playing video

games in the family room or paying bills in the home office. Entertaining also is easier, as mingling with guests is much more convenient when walls are not getting in the way.

A smaller home can feel much larger if it employs an open concept. The square footage is not divided into smaller quarters, which sometimes are rooms (such as formal dining rooms) that are only used a few times per year. This eliminates underused spaces and opens up sight lines in the layout.

The value of real estate has risen dramatically since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and prospective buyers may prefer an open-concept plan because it can help them minimize building costs.

Disadvantages of open floor plans

Open layouts are not for everyone. The same sense of space that occurs when walls are taken down may make rooms feel cavernous and less cozy, particularly in

homes with ample square footage. In addition, privacy can be hard to come by when all rooms feed into one another.

When the kitchen is not separate from the family room space, that makes it easy for noise to compromise the area's comfort levels. There is no hiding from noise in an open floor plan, as sounds from voices, television shows and appliances tend to echo and blend together. And if the home is a single-story layout, those noises from the main living areas also may carry to adjacent bedrooms.

Smoke and smells are another thing to consider. When something on the stove spills over, a small range hood will not be practical for clearing smoke from a large space. Though the aroma of freshly cooked food is enticing, it can make it hard for cooks to keep guests out of the kitchen.

Open-concept homes are popular, but homeowners should weigh the pluses and minuses to see if this trend is truly right for them.



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Make a dining room more elegant for entertaining

The kitchen may be the heart of a home, but when it comes to entertaining, a dining room — if one is present in a house — tends to be the prime gathering spot for meals.

Dining rooms may not be top on the list of spaces to renovate, as they tend to be used infrequently. But a dining room makeover may still be a worthy endeavor. Here are some simple ways to make the dining room more elegant and functional.

■ **Clear out the clutter.** The first step toward improving a dining room eating area is to remove any extraneous items from the space. If the dining room table is not used very often, it likely has become a catch-all for other items, such as bills, newspapers or kids' homework. Rather than using the

dining space as a makeshift office or homework station, invest in a rolling cart to store those papers and other items. Simply roll it into a closet or another room when it's time to host a party.

■ **Hang a statement light.** Few decorative items add as much drama and ambiance to a dining space as a new overhead light. People hear chandelier and think a bejeweled or crystal design. But various chandelier styles can fit the aesthetic of a home. The light will be a focal point and instantly make the dining area more elegant. Install the light on a dimmer to adjust the illumination as needed to set the mood.

■ **Invest in new linens.** Purchase coordinating table linens that will be used for special occasions. A



COURTESY PHOTO

Here are some simple ways to make the dining room more elegant and functional.-

decorative table cloth or table runner coupled with cloth napkins and placemats helps to set the scene of the dinner party.

■ **Add a piece of artwork.** Many modern homeowners have eschewed the China cabinet that once was standard in dining rooms. Rather than a bulky piece

of furniture, a large piece of statement-making artwork or framed photos over a more minimalistic buffet table or small service bar is preferable. Choose artwork that complements the colors in the space.

■ **Include a centerpiece.** Centerpieces add sophistication to the

table and tie into the event. Floral arrangements, a bowl or basket of fruit, pine cones or greens from outdoors, or collectibles like shells in a tall canister can serve as centerpieces.

There are many simple ways to dress up dining spaces and make them more elegant.



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How to approach a basement remodel

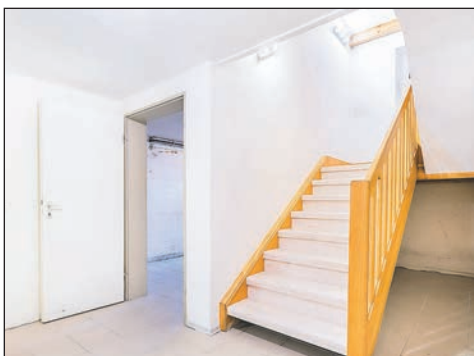
A fully finished and functional basement is a dream for many homeowners. Such a space, when completed, can serve as an entertainment space, a man cave, an artist's studio, or any number of additional functions.

Despite their usefulness, finished basements are something of a rarity. In an analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Construction, the National Association of Home Builders® found that only around 24 percent of single-family homes built in 2018 have basements. Homeowners who do not currently have a finished basement but are considering such a project can approach the remodel with a few key factors in mind. Careful consideration of these factors can ensure the project is budget-friendly and worthy of homeowners' investments.

■ **Investment value:** Conventional wisdom among home renovation and real estate experts suggests that a basement remodel is best if done to satisfy current inhabitants and not necessarily to appeal to prospective buyers once the home is put up for sale. Remodeling magazine reports that a midrange basement remodel costing around \$70,000 will provide a return of around \$49,000 (or 70 percent) at resale. Though that's not a poor return on investment, homeowners who are remodeling a basement solely for the potential ROI at resale can find other projects that provide a greater return.

■ **Foundation:** The foundation of the home must garner ample consideration before beginning a basement remodel. Certain foundation issues, such as soft concrete, cracked or curved outside walls and cracks in the flooring, are indicative of significant issues with the foundation. These issues can be costly to address, and they must be remedied before the basement remodel can begin.

■ **Existing space:** Some homeowners may have bought their homes with partially finished basements or even finished areas that they simply want to remodel. In such instances, a pre-remodel inspection from



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Homeowners who do not currently have a finished basement but are considering such a project can approach the remodel with a few key factors in mind.

a licensed home inspector can save homeowners lots of money and heartache over the long haul. Partially finished or even aging finished basements might not have been renovated in adherence to codes, which could lead to costly violations down the road. An inspection in advance of a remodel can give homeowners an idea of what they will need to do to bring the basement up to code. Local officials also can provide a list of necessary permits and a detailed description of requirements to ensure the remodeled basement adheres to code.

■ **Soil:** Soil surrounding the home should be tested prior to beginning the project. Radon is an odorless gas found in soil that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes can increase individuals' risk for lung cancer. Radon can seep into basements and increase that risk even further if it is present at elevated levels in the soil surrounding a home. Radon tests are simple and inexpensive, and no basement remodel project should begin without first conducting such a test.

Finished basements are valuable spaces. Homeowners who want to finish or remodel their basements should consider a host of factors before beginning the renovation

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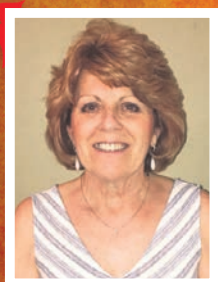


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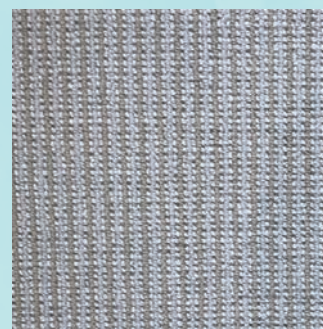
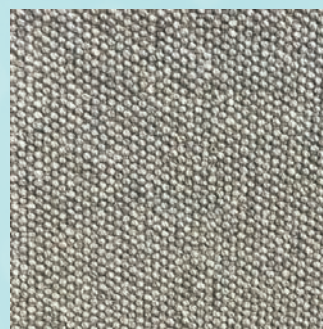


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