A Special Supplement to the

Winchester Press

APRIL 2013

spring home

HOME IMPROVEMENT & REAL ESTATE GUIDE

From roofing to decorating, plumbing to painting, this special supplement will help you get your home spruced up for spring.

Seniors benefit from Ontario renovation tax credit



Seniors take on the challenge of home renovations for all kinds of reasons. But if you're making home improvements to help you or a loved one get around the house more easily, consider the Ontario Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit. This initiative allows Ontario seniors, 65 and older, or family members who live with them, to receive a personal income tax credit for money spent on making a home safer or more accessible.

You can claim up to $10,000 worth of eligible home improvements on your tax return, and you will get 15 per cent of the eligible expenses you claim. For example, if you spend and then claim the maximum $10,000 worth of eligible expenses, you could get the maximum of $1,500 back. Seniors and their family members at all income levels are eligible.

Not all renovation work qualifies under this tax credit, however. Remember that renovations that are simply intended to improve the value of a home or recurring repairs don't qualify, such as plumbing or electrical work, repairs to a roof, and installing new windows.

Work that does qualify includes installing non-slip flooring or a hand-held shower in the bathroom, putting in door locks that are easy to operate, or adding a ramp to help you access your home from the outdoors.

For more info on the credit, or how to apply, visit www.ontario.ca/taxes-and-benefits/healthy-homes-renovation-tax-credit.

– News Canada

Debunking common myths about carpeting

Carpeting has long been a reliable flooring option to keep rooms looking good and feeling comfortable underfoot. There's something to be said about having a plush, warm cushion on the floors of a home. Carpeting can help buffer sounds and minimize injuries from falls. Walking around on a padded surface may minimize back and joint pain as well as feel more comfortable when going barefoot. Despite all of the advantages to carpeting, some people continue to avoid it for a variety of reasons, many of which are rooted in myth. The following are a few of the more common myths associated with carpeting.

Myth: Carpeting contributes to allergens constantly circulating throughout the home.

Fact: Carpeting is actually better at trapping allergens and dust in its fibers than smooth-surface floors. That means that with carpeting there are fewer particles airborne and circulating. Regular vacuuming can remove trapped allergens.

Myth: Carpets pose significant health risks.

Fact: Extensive toxicological assessments of the components of carpet have been studied through the years. There has been no conclusive evidence that carpets present any health risk, particularly of a carcinogenic nature.

Myth: Carpet is a source of indoor air quality problems.

Fact: Regular cleaning and vacuuming of carpet reduces the number of allergens contained within, which makes carpet no more likely to contribute to air quality issues than any other type of flooring.

Myth: Carpet has formaldehyde in it.

Fact: Formaldehyde was removed from the carpet-manufacturing process in 1978. It is unlikely anyone still has original carpeting from 35 years ago, and even if that is the case, the formaldehyde would have dissipated by now.

Myth: Carpeting is made from a host of chemical products.

Fact: Carpeting is made largely from nylon, wool, polypropylene, and polyester. These are the same materials used in clothing, which spends hours resting up against the skin. Polypropylene is one of the safer plastics that does not contain BPA and is even used in some baby bottles.

Myth: Mold grows regularly on carpeting.

Fact: Unless you have a flood or a leak that is keeping carpeting saturated, mold will not grow during regular use. Elevated humidity levels in a home also may contribute to mold growth. Mold is typically a result of a moisture issue. Remove the moisture and you remove the mold.

Myth: Thicker carpeting will wear longer and better.

Fact: It is not the thickness or plushness of the carpeting, but the density of the fibres that will be a telling clue of durability. This means a relatively thin carpet that is woven densely will likely last quite a while.

Myth: Carpeting can never be truly clean.

Fact: No surface can be 100 per cent free from dirt. But with proper cleaning, carpeting can be just as clean as other flooring materials.

Many people would like to have carpeting in their homes, but are deterred by a handful of enduring myths. Knowing the facts can help homeowners make more informed decisions regarding flooring materials.

Use bold paint colours for a fresh new look

Paint is one of the least expensive and most versatile means to changing the look of a room. According to the experts from *This Old House*, 60 per cent of the colours of a home that visitors perceive come from the paint on the walls. Choosing a colour scheme can be challenging, which is why so many people stick with neutrals like beige and white. For those who are ready to add a spark of colour, there are a few guidelines to consider.

Colour theory is a science and there are rules of using colour that are taught as early as a child's first foray into art class. We know there are primary, secondary, and complementary colours on the colour wheel. Even novice home decorators can do well with colour if they use the colour wheel as their guideline.

According to HGTV, colour should flow throughout a house. Every room need not be painted the same colour. However, colours should be complementary enough that they flow into one another. Don't paint one room in child's basic primary colours, while painting other rooms in jewel tones and pastels. Stick with one theme and carry it through the house.

Once you have decided to use a bold colour, first find your colour inspiration. Colour combinations that appear in nature are more readily accepted by people, so look for an



item in nature, such as a seashell or a flowering plant that you can base your colour choices on. Others pull inspiration from a particular design item. For instance, maybe an area rug strikes your fancy. Use colours that appear in the rug in the room.

Keep in mind that using bold colour doesn't mean you have to paint every wall from ceiling to floor in that colour. Rather, if you're just starting out with bold colours, select one wall to serve as an accent wall. Use that wall as your bold canvas and paint it with your chosen hue.

Some people like to experiment with a more flashy colour in a smaller space. If you're nervous about beginning in the living room or kitchen, how about trying out a bold colour in a smaller space, such as a powder room? A more intimate space might seem less overwhelming when painted in a bold colour. Go for a deep purple or another jewelled tone. However, try to avoid greens in the bathroom, as they may reflect off of the mirror and cast a hue onto your face that makes you look unwell. Pinks and peaches will shed a rosy glow.

If you will be incorporating complementary colours into the room, use the paint colour swatch as your guide. Most paint manufacturers use three or four different shades on one sample card. When selecting a complementary shade, be sure to pick from the same tone on the card. That means if you're choosing the darkest of colour #1 from a card, you'll want to choose the darkest from colour #2.

Another idea is to leave walls neutral and use bold colour on design accents. For example, designers at www.marthastewart.com recommend painting the inside of niches, shelves or cabinets with glass doors in bright tones and the outside white to create an eye-catching space without going overboard. Put a bold colour on moulding or use an appliance or a fixture in a bright colour as your splash of boldness.

Remember to have balance. If you will be painting an entire room in a bold colour, think about having the other decor items in neutral colours. Sofas and rugs should be neutral colours, or consider toning down a vibrant colour with the use of white moulding or baseboards.



Including an island in your kitchen redesign

Homeowners planning a kitchen remodel are no doubt considering whether to include a kitchen island in the new design. When the space allows, an island can be a fine way to enhance the look of a kitchen and impart an upscale appeal.

Interest in kitchen islands has grown steadily for the past several decades. Introduced in the 1970s, islands became a popular place for guests to congregate and provided extra counter space for meal preparation and entertaining. The suburban migration led to bigger homes with larger kitchens. Through the 1980s and 1990s, homes grew even larger, and islands became a popular feature of kitchens across the country.

The increase in food-based programming on television has also contributed to the popularity of kitchen islands. As more people dabble with preparing their own gourmet meals, kitchen islands have become more convenient.

Although there are many benefits to an island in the kitchen, there are also some disadvantages to kitchen islands. Weighing all the options can help homeowners design a kitchen layout that is functional, affordable, and practical for the space they have.



Homeowners should question whether a kitchen island is a practicality for their renovation project.

Pros

Arguably the most significant advantage to having a kitchen island is the added space it provides. Many times islands are built with cabinetry that matches the rest of the kitchen design, and those cabinets provide storage space for pots, pans, and other kitchen tools. Islands may double the storage space available in the kitchen.

Kitchen islands are also advantageous when preparing meals. Kitchen counter space can be easily gobbled up by toaster ovens, rotisserie cookers, microwaves, coffee makers, and various other countertop appliances. These appliances can take up valuable real estate that's sorely missed when preparing meals. An island can be used solely for cooking and preparation, and some homeowners have incorporated cutting boards and a prep sink into the design of the island.

Islands also can be customized according to a homeowner's needs. Instead of simply having cabinetry beneath the counter, some opt to have a wine cooler or even a bookshelf for keeping cookbooks within reach. An additional small dishwasher or beverage refrigerator may be tucked into the design of the island.

For others, the island may be a makeshift kitchen office space.

Cons

Expense is a leading negative factor with regard to a kitchen island. The additional material necessary and the labour involved in installation may bust some homeowners' budgets. Stationary islands can cost several thousand dollars to install, and this is money a homeowner may be better off investing elsewhere.

In smaller kitchens, an island may be impractical because of the space limitation. Islands are typically at the heart of the kitchen and may interfere with walking space or cause clearance issues when the refrigerator door or cabinet doors are open. For homeowners who find space is at a premium in the kitchen, an island may not be the best idea. However, a rolling island that can be moved into position when needed, then stored in a convenient, out-of-the-way location might be a viable option.

Depending on the complexity of a kitchen island, its installation may extend the amount of time required to complete the kitchen renovation. This can prolong the length of time needed to complete the work. Running a gas or electric line and plumbing to the island may require a major overhaul and demolition.

Kitchen islands are popular components of home designs. Before homeowners engage in any kitchen renovation that may include the incorporation of an island, they should know the advantages and disadvantages.

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How to clean dirty windows like a professional

Dirty windows are unsightly, and they can prevent beneficial sunlight from entering a home. Cleaning windows need not be done every week, but it shouldn't be overlooked completely, either. While it certainly may be a chore to clean windows, there are ways to make the task much more tolerable.

Curb appeal can be very important when selling a home. Even a home with a perfectly manicured lawn and the newest roofing and siding can seem unappealing if the windows are dirty. Keeping windows clean requires a good deal of work. For the acrophobics, cleaning second-storey windows can test the nerves. Having the right tools on hand and a strategy in place will make the job easier to manage.



Cleaning windows

Cleaning windows won't necessarily be easy, but the following nine-step process can make the task less difficult and time-consuming.

1. Choose a day when it is overcast so you will not be blinded by the sun while cleaning. This also helps prevent streaking. Begin by gathering what you'll need to get the task done. Having everything at the ready will enable you to move from one window to the next.

Here are the basic supplies you will need:

- cleaning solution
- cloth, newspaper, or squeegee
- towel
- spray bottle
- extension pole to reach high windows
- vacuum
- ladder or step stool
- garden hose

2. Take down and clean drapery or blinds when cleaning the windows. Remove the curtains so you will have an unobstructed surface with which to work.

3. Start with the interior side of the windows, as they are easier to access. Place a towel on the sill to catch any drops so the sill or the floor will stay dry.

4. Spray a lint-free cloth or the window directly with the cleaning solution. The edges and corners of the window tend to accumulate the most grime, so begin by cleaning those areas first. Once they are clean and you will not exchange dirt to the centre of the window, work on the middle. Wipe the windows in a horizontal direction to help alleviate dripping.

5. To create a streak-free surface, some people prefer to use a squeegee to drag out any pockets of moisture for more even drying. Be sure to wipe the rubber strip of the squeegee after each pass on the window. You may choose to buff out any other streaks with newspaper.

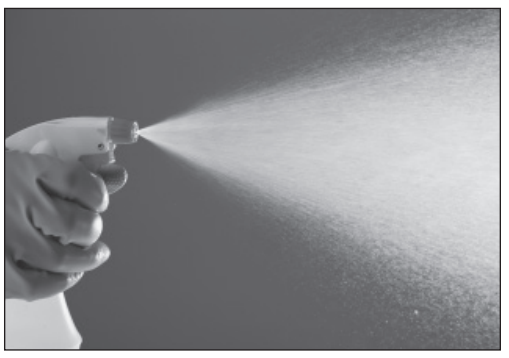
6. Vacuum the window sill and frame afterward to catch any dust and debris.

7. Repeat the process for all interior windows.

8. Move outdoors and start off by spraying the window with a garden hose to loosen any of the accumulated grime. Use your cleaning solution to dissolve the rest of the dirt. You may want to let it sit on the window if there is stubborn grime. Repeat the cleaning process used indoors for each window.

9. If exterior second-floor windows are hard to reach, consider using a ladder and extension pole to extend your reach. Upper windows will not be scrutinized as closely as lower windows, so you may have a greater margin for error. If the windows are simply too high up, rely on a professional window cleaner to get the job done rather than risk falls or other injuries.

Homemade glass cleaner



1/4 cup rubbing alcohol
1/4 cup white vinegar
1 Tbsp cornstarch
2 cups warm water

Combine everything in a spray bottle, and shake well. Shake well before using, too, as the cornstarch might settle at the bottom (and subsequently plug the spray mechanism if it's not mixed in well).

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Harbers puts emphasis on design and efficiency

WILLIAMSBURG – April has arrived and now is the time that most homeowners begin tackling the dreaded spring-cleaning. Some take this annual ritual one step further by creating a list of seasonal projects and renovations… Things to spruce up the home, make it safer, warmer, and cozier for the upcoming winter.

While Joy and Brian Harbers of Harbers Flame Centre and Masonry in Williamsburg are often called upon to install new stoves or fireplaces for customers, lately, more often than not, they are being asked to update a customer's current system to make it more heat efficient or to make it match their home's recent makeover.

"People are renovating their existing homes," Joy said. "They're updating and making improvements to the homes they're in."

In some cases, she said, customers are choosing to switch out fuel sources, going from wood to gas, for instance. In other cases, customers are choosing to change the face, mantel and hearth of their fireplace, ultimately giving it a complete facelift without altering the actual heating system itself.

Changing the face of a fireplace can give it a totally new look, Joy added.

Right now, she said, the trend seems to be toward clean lines and less detail... More of a modern look.

"That's what our industry has been introducing to us… more viewing area, enhanced log sets, a more prominent look," she said. "To complement that, we have done some research to find different stones and tiles."

In addition to décor, customers seem to be focused on efficiency.

"We pay dearly for our heat in Ontario," Joy said. "People realize that and they want to save what they can. They're going for higher efficiency."

The units the business sells, whether they use wood, gas, propane, or some other fuel type, are meant to be efficient. In fact, many of the fireplaces have turndown rates, which allow the user to adjust the heat setting for cool spring nights, as opposed to the harsh cold of winter.

"People are putting them right in their living spaces… For ambiance and for heat," she added.





Joy Harbers (above) turned on this sleek modern propane-fueled fireplace using a remote. With the multitude of options available in colour, layout, and fuel source, this fireplace can be designed to match a customer's personal style. Harbers Flame Centre and Masonry has a host of wood burning options, including this dual-loading stove (at left) and, in behind, decorative fireplace.

Press Photos – Casselman

The Harbers plan to attend several dealer shows this spring, looking for the newest on technology, as well as design options.

"A lot of our manufacturers are coming out with more new products," Joy said. "[And] Brian is trying to be creative, playing around with some mantels."

Brian is currently working on a new mantel he designed using locally sourced steel. He has the steel bent into shape and then he works on it, using heat to get just the right colouring. No piece, Joy said, is the same as another – each one is unique.

Although not finished yet, Brian plans to design an entire layout around the mantel, which is currently on display in the showroom at 4385 Billy Lane west of Williamsburg. In fact, the Harbers have already taken orders for the new design.

In addition to showroom displays, Harbers Flame Centre also has a design room, complete with a computer, design software, and a television monitor. Customers who prefer to have a visual of the end product can do so here, where Joy can access manufacturer websites and show customers exactly what a fireplace will look like depending on the types of material chosen for the fuel, the mantel, the face, and the hearth.

"We only sell products I know will work well for you," Joy said.

When the couple finds something new that they like and think their customers will like, they bring it home and try it out in either their own house or in their warehouse for a period of one to two years.

Their current number one selling multi-fuel pellet stove, which uses a combination of pellets coupled with wheat, barley, sweetgrass or corn, is an example of that policy put into practice. Joy said that until she knows she can vouch for a product, she doesn't sell it.

In addition to installing a variety of heating units and designing the overall decorative effect, the Harbers are also available for annual inspections and cleaning services.

Brian Harbers is a certified licensed mason, as well as a wood energy technical training (W.E.T.T.) technician. The Harbers have been in business since the 1990s.

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Lannin Home Building Centre's team is focused on providing great customer service on a daily basis, whether in the store or out in the lumberyard. Together for a store family photo are: owner J.D. Van Noy (left), John Wilkie, Merrilyn Haarsma, Sam Wade, Sam Hummel, Dan Rainey, Cameron Willis, and Terri Tilley. Missing from photo: Carolyn Barkley, Grace Tilley, and Gail Van Noy. *Press Photo – Casselman*

Lannin Home Building Centre expands selection to meet customers' needs

WINCHESTER – Spring is here, summer is on the way, and it is time to get ready for gardening, weekend barbecues, daily lawn care, and lazy days lounging on the backyard deck with friends and family.

This year, Lannin Home Building Centre in Winchester is making everything a little bit easier by offering customers a bigger, more varied selection at the 2682 County Rd. 31 store.

As part of Canada's Home Hardware family, Lannin's has always been able to procure any requested company item that may not already be in stock at the local store. Now, however, Lannin's is attempting to meet the growing need for those items that seem to get the most requests. Snowblowers, for instance, were a popular item this past winter, while small riding lawn mowers are expected to be in demand during the upcoming season.

In addition, Lannin's is currently growing its line of housewares products, including small appliances, as well as its line of cleaning supplies, and gardening items. Other categories will continue to be added as needs arise.

Each week, the store receives new additions to its current stock and displays, owner J.D. Van Noy said. Some of the additions already available in the store are laundry baskets, soil, fertilizer, insect repellants, and more.

As part of the store's new gardening section, there will be a Mark's Choice display featuring items recommended by professional gardener Mark Cullen.

In the housewares department, Van Noy expects to carry lines of pots and pans, as well as a variety of small appliances.

While cleaning supplies have been available at the local store in the past, the size of this section will more than double from its original four feet to an estimated eight to 12 feet, Van Noy said.

With all the changes happening and the additional items available, Van Noy guarantees that lumber and building supply services will not be negatively impacted.

"It's just so we have a little broader selection," he said. "Our core has always been lumber and building supplies."

Van Noy alone has roughly 30 years experience in both. The majority of his employees also have extensive experience in related fields, like Sam Wade, who has been with Lannin's for 13 years and worked as a contractor before that.

Lannin Home Building Centre provides both contractors and homeowners with fast and accurate estimates for a host of projects, from building a deck to building a garage and more. While Lannin's is not yet equipped to install or complete a job, they do have a list of local reputable contractors for customer convenience.

It appears that more often, now, homeowners are purchasing the raw materials and hiring contractors to complete the work as opposed to having the contractor do everything, Van Noy said. This, he added, allows the customer greater choice in the selection of materials used and more freedom in the design of the end product.

Whatever they're looking for – whether it be lumber for a new garage or supplies for making a vegetable garden – a customer is sure to get the one-on-one personal service they need at Lannin Home Building Centre. Each customer is greeted upon entry, and Lannin's employees are trained to find a solution to whatever customer need presents itself.

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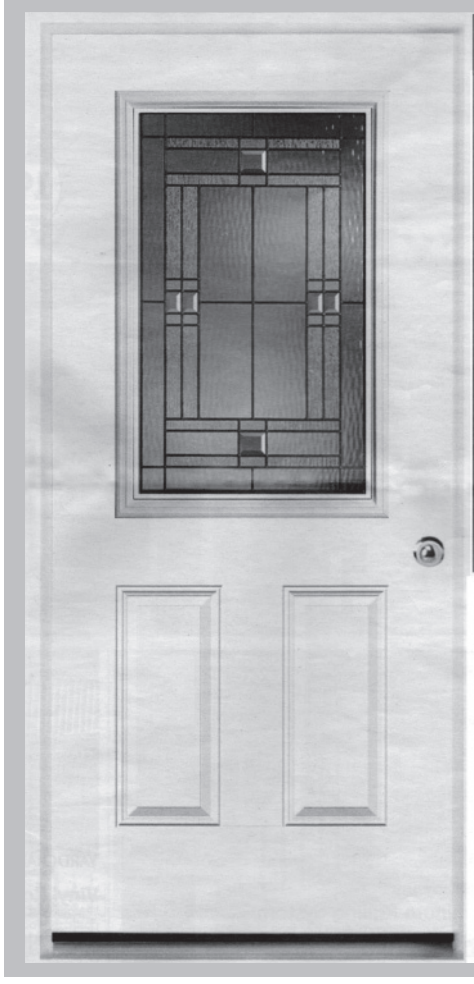

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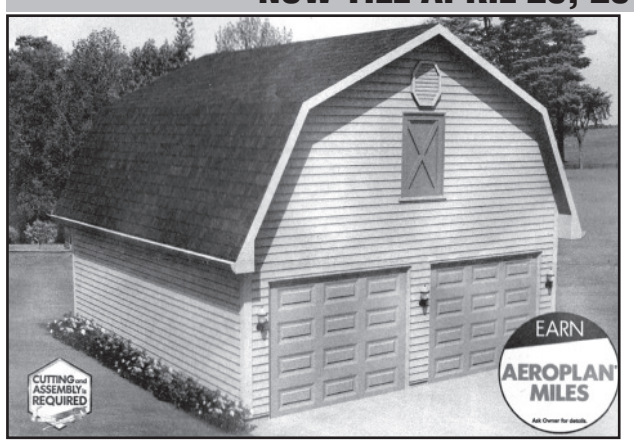

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The dos and don'ts of basement finishing

Remodeling a basement is a popular home improvement project. A finished basement makes the space more functional and, when done correctly, can add a considerable amount of living space to a home.

Finishing a basement pays dividends in additional space in a home that doesn't require the same level of investment as putting an addition on the house. Also, the groundwork for a finished room is already there, as most basements are already set up with a poured concrete floor and some walls, usually cinder blocks. Some electrical components, plumbing, and the creature comforts of drywall, and a more inviting floor, might be all that's necessary to finish a basement. The process can be labour-intensive, and many people prefer to leave it to a professional contractor. Whatever finishing method is chosen, homeowners should follow the proper procedures when doing the work.

Do start with a detailed plan

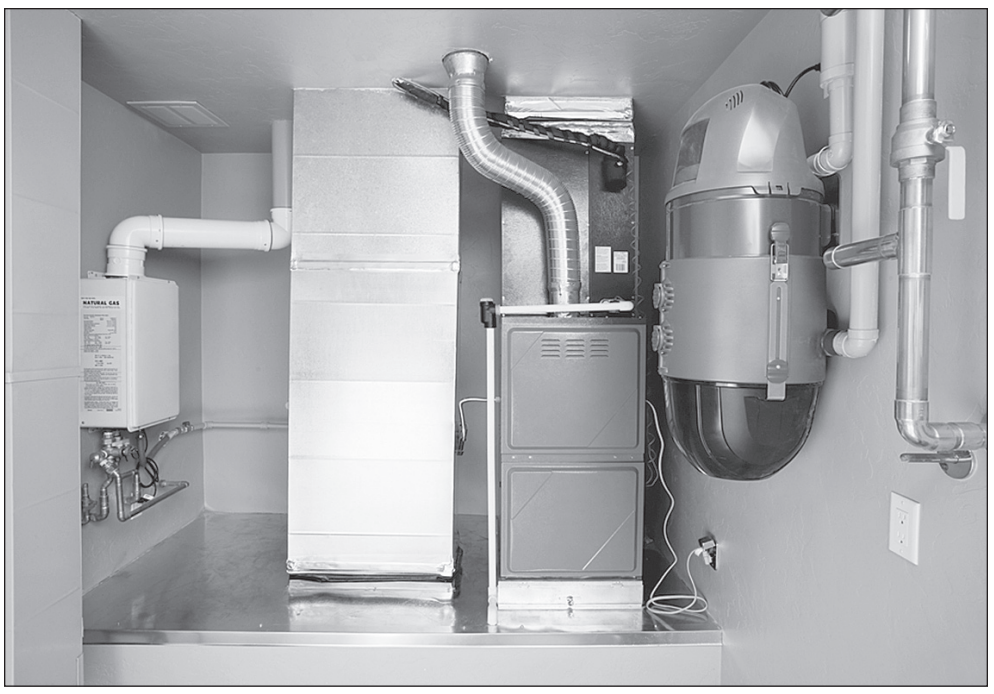
Measure out the basement and mark any items that cannot be moved, such as a furnace, water heater, or pipes. Create a design board that showcases the materials you plan to use on the project. Think about ways you plan to arrange furniture and consider all of the possible uses for the room. Will it be a home theatre? Will someone be sleeping down there? Each scenario will require certain amenities and safety requirements.

Don't plan to finish the entire basement

Doing so will leave you without a storage or utility area where you can house holiday decorations, tools, luggage, and similar items.

Do get the scoop on building codes

Knowing what the municipality allows in basement remodeling will help you to customize a plan that is functional, safe, and legal. No one wants to be slapped with fines for failing to follow the rules. Plus, failure to meet building codes could mean the work that has been done must be torn out and redone. It pays to follow the chain of command and secure permits while having all work inspected.



Start with a plan

The first thing to do when finishing a basement is to draw a detailed plan of the space. Mark all items that cannot be moved, such as the furnace, water heater, and pipes.

Don't overlook adequate lighting in your refinishing plan

A basement is likely to be an area of the house that has limited natural light. With the traditional small windows, or no windows at all, a basement needs ample lighting in its design scheme. This may include a combination of overhead and task lighting. Ample lighting will help the room feel like part of the house and not just a forgotten storage area.

Do take into consideration moisture issues in the basement

Many basements are plagued by moisture issues ranging from water seepage to condensation forming on walls. These situations may vary depending on the weather throughout the year. Certain materials may need to be used to mitigate water issues before finishing can take place. The installation of water-barrier systems, drainage, sump pumps, or encapsulation products could drive up the cost of a basement renovation. It is essential to have a professional assess the basement water issues prior to starting any finishing work.

Don't simply cover up potential hazards, such as mold or mildew

Have them treated instead. Otherwise, you could have a breeding ground behind drywall that could lead to unsafe conditions in the home.

Do have a radon test

Radon is a hidden killer that can cause lung cancer. Because it occurs naturally in the soil and water surrounding a home and is impossible to detect without a specialized test, many people are unaware of the presence of radon until it is too late. Radon may be more concentrated in the basement, where the foundation is touching the soil. Therefore, rule out radon before considering renovation of a basement area.

Don't limit furniture choices to one type

You may need to be flexible in your furniture choices, even selecting modular pieces, like sectionals, because entryways to basements may have small doorways or obstructions that make adding furniture more challenging.

Remember the possibility of flooding

Homes that are near waterways or at low elevation may be at risk of flooding. Basements are especially susceptible to flood damage. Therefore, think about the practicality of finishing a basement if you are prone to flooding. If you decide to move ahead, take certain precautionary measures, such as keeping electrical wiring up higher and using a more water-resistant flooring material, like tile or vinyl. House important electronics and items on shelves so they are not at ground-level.

Finishing a basement is a job that can add a lot of usable space to a home. Go about the project in the right way to keep within budget and have a room that is safe and functional.

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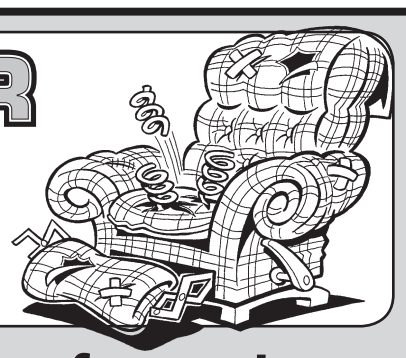
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How to motivate kids to help with spring cleaning

Spring is in the air, and it's time for some seasonal rejuvenation. This month, bring a fresh vibe into your home by recruiting the help of your children. Whether they're chasing dust bunnies or gathering toys strewn around the house, there are many ways to keep your children occupied and entertained so they won't stray from their tasks.



Challenge each other

A bit of competition can make housework more fun. How about your very own ''Spring Cleaning Olympics'' with medals and treats for everyone at the end? The first one to strip their bed and put the sheets into the laundry hamper can choose an afternoon snack for the entire family. Or, the first one to complete their list can make the selection for movie night. Get creative and let the games begin.

Dance your way to a clean house

Challenge your family to complete a task within the length of their favourite song. Let your children select their own music – they'll feel more energized and motivated. You can practice your dance moves to your own favourite tunes.

Make it a life lesson

Have your children gather clothes they have outgrown, along with books and toys they no longer want and take them to a local shelter or donate them to charity. This is a valuable way to help families in need, and it's also an environmentally-friendly way to get rid of unwanted items. You can also hold a garage sale and donate a portion of the proceeds to a non-profit organization. The Christian Children's Fund of Canada (www.ccfcanada.ca), for example, works to improve the lives of children in some of the poorest communities around the world.

Reward time

When your children realize that their contribution is appreciated and rewarded by a good result that benefits everyone, they'll enjoy helping around the house more often. A completed task or a clean room is cause for celebration, so treat your kids to their favourite dinner and some DVD time.

– News Canada

Build a solid relationship with your home renovation contractor

People do home renovations for many reasons, but the one constant – no matter what type of project you are planning – is playing it smart when it comes to dealing with contractors. And that's why the Ontario Ministry of Consumer Services offers these helpful tips:

1. Find a contractor you trust: Ask friends and family to recommend a contractor they've had success with, preferably one they've worked with on a project similar to yours. When you've found a contractor, ask for at least three references – again from people who have done projects like yours. If possible, visit the references' homes and take a look at the renovations for yourself. Ensure that the contractor has all the right licences – for gas installation, electrical work, plumbing and the like – to do your job, or a clear plan for sub-contracting that work to licensed tradespeople, and has made you aware of all the necessary building permits. Finally, do some online research on the contractor, and check the Consumer Beware List (www.ontario.ca/ConsumerBeware) to see if he or she has been the subject of a consumer complaint or legal action.

2. Get your contract in writing: Your contractor should give you a written agreement listing in detail all the work to be completed, the timelines, and the payment schedule. Under the table, cash-only deals may seem great, but what happens when things don't go as planned and, in the worst case scenario, you attempt to take legal action against a contractor? Without a contract, it is hard to prove wrongdoing. Any responsible contractor knows that a written agreement protects both parties.

3. Know your rights and responsibilities about how and what a contractor can charge you: Did you know that under Ontario law, home renovation companies cannot charge you more than 10 percent above the price of a written estimate without a change order that you agree to? And did you know that if you sign any deal with a contractor in your home, you have a 10-day "cooling-off" period to change your mind and cancel? These are just two consumer rights in Ontario that are useful to be aware of when dealing with a contractor on a home-renovations project.

There is a lot to consider when thinking about home renovations – but when they are successful, it's a win-win situation for both the homeowner and the contractor.

For more information, visit: http://www.sse.gov.on.ca/mcs/en/Pages/Homes_Repairs_and_Renovations.aspx.

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A new spin on laundry room design and function

When purchasing a home, buyers often look at the kitchen space and how many bedrooms there are, while largely ignoring other rooms, including the laundry room. Oftentimes, the washer and dryer are relegated to a dark corner of the basement and homeowners simply accept their laundry lot.

More and more manufacturers now produce washers and dryers that are both functional and aesthetically appealing. As a result, homeowners and renters need not feel they have to hide laundry rooms like they did in the past. Having the laundry area nearby the family action – and paying attention to laundry room design – can make the work of keeping clothes tidy that much easier.

Many designers would agree that you need not sacrifice style for function in a laundry room. As with any other area of the house, impart design elements into the room and make it a room in which you want to spend time.



Put some consideration into how you design your laundry room.

• First and foremost, select appliances that offer the features you need and want. Also, find appliances that fit the space you have. Front-loading appliances have become the latest must-have, but some units may be too big or expensive for your space. Those with a limited area for laundry can invest in a stackable set, in which the washer and dryer are combined into one vertical unit. For those who want to add a pop of colour, select among the variety of coloured washers and dryers that are turning up in store showrooms. You're no longer limited to white, black, and beige.

• Consider cabinetry in your laundry space. Cabinets and drawers are not just for the kitchen. They can hide cleaning products, detergent, dryer sheets, and so much more. Fill drawers with stain-removal sticks and items to mend clothes that may be missing a button or have a small hole that needs tending.

• A laundry area can be much more than just a place to wash and fold clothes. Many people like to turn this spot into a multipurpose zone. By including some shelving and a refrigerator in the laundry room, you can create a food-storage pantry. A large countertop normally used to fold clothes can also double as a gift-wrapping station. Think about merging a laundry room with a craft room where sewing or scrapbooking can take place.

• Remember to leave room for the soiled clothing. Raising hamper bins off of the floor to be suspended from a rod above the washer frees up valuable floor space. Otherwise, keep the hamper behind a curtain or tucked into a cabinet to ensure the laundry room always looks neat, even when you haven't yet gotten to the newest pile of dirty clothes.

• Don't be afraid of adding colour and artwork to the laundry space. In fact, embrace it. Here's an out-of-the-way area of the home where you can explore your creativity and have a little fun. Try an eye-opening colour, such as apple green or bright yellow to add a sunny disposition to the room.

• You don't have to spend a fortune on a laundry room re-do. Shop in salvage stores or antique shops for custom pieces to add character to the space. You can probably find cabinetry or shelving for a fraction of the cost of new items, and these older items may add more character to the space.

• Remember counter space. Save space by installing a counter just above the dryer so you will have a place to fold and stack clothing.

• Location, location. The bulk of dirty clothes will be generated in the bedrooms and bathroom of the house. But who wants to carry clothes down to a laundry area on a lower level? See if you can tuck a laundry room into an upstairs closet or nook to save steps.

Although a laundry room is often an afterthought, taking time to organize and plan the space can make it both functional and inviting.

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How to reduce noise in the home

Noise in a home is a problem that can affect just about anyone. Noise can occur inside or be the product of noisy situations outside of the home. Eventually these sounds can try a homeowner's patience, but there are various ways to cope with noise.



• **Reduce the human scope of noise.** One of the first steps to take is reducing the amount of noise generated by people inside of the house. If video games are noisy, encourage children to wear headphones so the entire household is not subjected to the sounds of the game. Set limits on the volume of the television and try to keep only one set on at a given time in the house, particularly if televisions are located in rooms where doors cannot be closed to block the sound. People can also lower their speaking voices inside of the house.

• **Use sound-dampening furnishings.** There are many benefits to having hardwood flooring throughout a home, including its beauty. But hardwood flooring could reflect sound waves and cause them to echo around the house. Area rugs will help to muffle the sound, but carpeting is much better for sound insulation. The carpeting and the padding underneath will absorb sounds, including footfalls on floors above. Hanging pictures on the wall and using drapery on windows also can absorb sound and prevent it from bouncing off of bare walls.

• **Change windows.** If sounds are coming from outside, it might be worth the investment to upgrade windows, although this can prove costly. Many homeowners with outdoor noise issues install triple-paned windows, which reduce sound and also provide significant energy savings. Changing the window frames is another option. Metal frames will transmit sound better than wood, fibreglass, or vinyl.

• **Install door sweeps.** A door sweep is not only effective at preventing drafts, but sweeps can prevent sounds from coming through as well.

• **Check where drywall ends.** Most drywall is not installed flush with the floor surface. Remove the base moulding and you might find an inch gap from the floor where sound can escape. You can reduce noise by using a spray foam insulation in this area and then replacing the moulding. A similar tactic can be used around electrical outlets.

• **Add additional insulation.** Thicker walls make it hard for sound to travel throughout a home. You also can install a sound-stopping wallboard over existing drywall. Putting more insulation in the attic can reduce weather sounds generated from rain falling on the roof.

• **Plant sound-buffering trees and shrubs.** For sounds that are generated outdoors, a sound bluff, like a line of thick bushes, can dull sound and provide added privacy.

Exploring different ways to reduce noise in a home can create a more peaceful environment.

Questions to ask your roofing contractor

A strong, durable roof is an essential component of your home's overall health and functionality.

"If you want lasting and reliable results, choosing a qualified roofing contractor is the first step," says Steve Gray, a broker with Royal LePage Kelowna. "The right contractor will be knowledgeable and ready for any of your questions." Gray recommends asking the following three questions for sure:

1. Do you carry liability and worker's safety insurance? In case of an accident, it is important to make sure that you, as a home owner, are not held financially accountable. Before hiring, make sure any damage to your house, or worker injuries incurred during installation of the new roof, are covered under the contractor's insurance.



2. What kind of warranty do you offer and what does it cover? Accredited roofing companies offer two kinds of warranties. One will cover the installation of your roof and the other will cover materials from the company's supplier.

3. How long have you been in the roofing business and can you provide referrals? Making it in today's competitive business marketplace is a challenge no matter what industry you're in. Successful businesses persevere because they are qualified and produce desirable results, thereby creating satisfied customers. Seek out a roofing company with an established history of professionalism and reliability in your community. Ask your friends and family members for referrals and for their experiences with specific companies.

If you're still unsure about a contractor, consider contacting the Better Business Bureau (BBB). Research potential candidates thoroughly and ask the right questions. More information can be found online at www.royallepage.ca.

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Converting a kid's room into an adult space

When a young adult leaves the comforts of home to set out on his or her own, homeowners are left with a bedroom that just calls out to be made over. However, the experience of a child leaving the nest can be bittersweet, and some parents struggle with the decision to renovate or leave the room intact. Converting a room can be an emotional process, but there are several different ways to put a newly vacated room to good use.

What to do with a room may hinge on who still lives in the house. Another child, for instance, may be interested in "upgrading" to the room if it is larger or has amenities that the previous bedroom does not offer, like a better view or a bigger closet. Some have plans for a craft space or a library. Perhaps the room would be perfect for a "man cave" or a quiet sitting area.

Keep in mind that the room may hold sentimental value for the child, so converting the space is not something that should happen abruptly or without prior notice given to the former occupant. Communication is key before the room can be permanently changed into a new room. To get started, follow these guidelines:

• **Start slowly.** Broach the subject with the former occupant of the room to gauge his or her reaction to the idea. If your child is supportive, then the process may move along more quickly. If not, you may need to wait a little longer before starting the renovation.

• **Go through the room's contents together.** Your child may feel his or her private sanctum was violated if you simply box up belongings and ready them to be taken away. Instead, go through the room together and allow your son or daughter to pack away items of sentimental value. Other items can be donated. Consider which pieces of furniture might be kept and repurposed.

• **Keep some items of value.** Remember, you don't want your child to feel like his or her identity has been erased from the house. Find a way to incorporate something from the bedroom into the new design to pay homage to the person who lived and grew up in the room. Keep a square of removed wallpaper and frame it. Put some well-read childhood books on a shelf. Have a place of honour for the first soccer trophy. This way when your child returns home there will still be a piece of the room's former identity.

• **Work through your new design plan.** Before removing furniture and any items, draw up a detailed renovation plan and establish a budget. If the room will become a guest room, the basics may already be there and you simply need to introduce new linens and a new paint colour to transform the space. Consider keeping the room functional as a sleeping space in some way – whether moving in a sleeper sofa or making a regular bed into a daybed – so when your son or daughter comes to visit, he or she will have a comfortable space.

• **Make it sophisticated.** Adult spaces differ from children's spaces in their sophistication. Starting fresh with more streamlined furniture and bolder colours in the room will give it a grownup look.

Converting a child's former bedroom into a new and exciting living space for adults takes some planning and sensitivity. A collaborative effort between parent and child can make the process can go much more smoothly.



This sophisticated look works well for a guest room.

Did you know?

A new roof can be one of the more expensive repairs for homeowners. But homeowners don't have to break the bank when it comes to replacing a roof, which can be made from a variety of materials that can vary greatly in price. Asphalt shingles are the most affordable roofing material and that budget-friendly price is one reason why asphalt shingles are so popular. The asphalt shingles of today are also durable, which was not always the case. Durable and aesthetically appealing, metal roofing is another option that's popular in areas that get heavy snowfall because snow does not build up on the metal like it might on other materials. The price of metal roofing varies significantly, so homeowners considering a metal roof should do some comparison shopping before making a decision.



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Safety measures can help reduce bathroom injuries

Falls cause many injuries inside a home. Seniors are especially susceptible to harmful falls in the bathroom, where slippery tiles can prove too difficult for older men and women to navigate.

Bathrooms can be more dangerous than other rooms of the house for a variety of reasons. The bathroom is generally comprised of hard surfaces that can become slippery when wet or exposed to high humidity. A bathroom may become hotter than other rooms because of the steam that accompanies a hot shower. Heat may dilate peripheral veins and lower blood pressure in some people. This may lead to dizziness that can result in falls. Furthermore, people tend to rush in the bathroom as they get ready for work or school. Rushing around can lead to slips and injuries on wet surfaces.

Installing safety features in the bathroom is a key way to reduce the risk of accidents. Many manufacturers have even designed these features so they blend with bathroom decor.

When renovating bathrooms for safety, consider the following options:

• **Anti-scald features:** Burns can be serious business. Few people have been spared the momentary burst of hot water that occurs in the shower or at the faucet when another household member flushes a toilet or uses a large amount of cold water elsewhere in the house. Anti-scald showerheads and faucets prevent sudden bursts of hot water. Use in conjunction with turning down the temperature of the hot water heater to eliminate burns.

• **Nonslip mats:** Bathroom injuries often occur when people are getting in and out of the shower. Having a non-slip mat on the inside of the shower or tub as well as one with a grippable surface and plush top layer on which to step after exiting the shower can reduce falls. Don't step out of the shower onto a flimsy towel that can slip out from underneath your feet.

• **Bath bench:** The elderly or those prone to lightheadedness in the shower may want to invest in a bench or seat to put into the shower. This enables sitting while washing.

• **Safety bars:** It can be tempting to grab onto towel racks or faucets to get in and out of the shower, but these items cannot provide the necessary leverage to safely move in and out of the shower or bathtub. Safety bars with a brushed surface for traction are more secure. Grab bars need to be securely attached to a wood stud in the wall and not into drywall or the tub enclosure.

• **Raised toilet seat:** A raised toilet seat reduces the amount of squatting and the distance that has to be covered to sit on the commode. Grab bars on the raised seat itself will provide added safety.

• **Telephone:** The bathroom may seem like an odd place to install a telephone, but having one nearby in the event of injury can ensure help gets to the injured party much more quickly.

• **Regular cleaning:** Routinely ridding showers and tubs of soap scum and mildew can reduce the slippery coating that forms as a result of these substances. Also, be sure to keep clutter in the bathroom to a minimum to stop trips and falls over errant items in the area.

Did you know?

More and more homeowners are embracing a relatively new way to shower. Walk-in, or walk-behind, showers are doorless structures that are designed to give the shower a more open look. Walk-in showers often appear larger than more traditional showers, and those that do take up more space do so to prevent water from spraying around the room. Though walk-in showers do not have doors, they do employ a glass partition to keep water in. Walk-in showers often give a bathroom a more modern look, but their role is more than aesthetic. In fact, many seniors find it is easier to get in and out of a walk-in shower, something that could reduce their risk of falling and suffering an injury.

Origin of the kitchen work triangle

The kitchen is arguably the most-used room in the house during waking hours. Having a kitchen that is laid out in an efficient manner can improve productivity and make for a more enjoyable experience.



Designers often stress having an effective work triangle in the kitchen. The phrase "kitchen work triangle" started with the Building Research Council (formerly the Small Homes Council) at the University of Illinois. The idea came from studies of space usage and the search for efficient kitchen designs.

What the triangle essentially means is positioning three key items of the kitchen for efficiency. The stove, sink, and refrigerator represent the three main points of the triangle. Having these items spaced accordingly can make work easier. Having them too close together can create a cramped, ineffective room.

The placement of the triangle points alone does not make a successful layout. According to the University of Missouri Extension, the triangle space should also be measured accordingly. Put four to seven feet between the refrigerator and sink, four to six feet between the sink and stove, and four to nine feet between the stove and refrigerator, with the ideal size resulting in a work triangle where the three sides total between 15 and 22 feet.

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The pros and cons of open floor plans

Open floor plans have evolved to be the floor plan of choice in new homes and current home renovations. Turn on a home renovation show, and you're likely to see eager homeowners knocking down walls to open the kitchen to the family room. Walls have become anathema to homeowners.

There are many supporters of the open floor plan, particularly those who entertain frequently or like to keep an eye on children throughout the house. Although open floor plans are touted, there are plenty of people who have never been enamoured with having all of their rooms flowing into one. There also are some people who prefer a different style.

For those who are not fans of the open floor plan, blame the excess of the 1980s for their inception. In homes built in the 1960s and 1970s, rooms were compartmentalized and isolated for specific activities. During the 1980s, an era of "bigger is better," when entertaining was widely popular among homeowners, designers noticed that many homeowners preferred an open floor plan in which rooms merged into one another, creating the illusion of more space. These floor plans also enable people to be in separate rooms and still interact with one another across the space.

A home's floor plan largely depends on the preference of the homeowner. There are many advantages to having an open floor plan versus one that is more



compartmentalized. Here is a look at some of the pros and cons.

PRO: Open floor plans can be safer for parents of young children. If the home opens up with the living spaces branching off from the kitchen, parents can keep an eye on children while preparing dinner. It also eliminates the number of places that kids can hide and get into mischief.

CON: Privacy is reduced in a home with few walls. Much in the way that an open floor plan enables children to be seen from every angle, it also enables you to be seen – and all of your belongings as well. There's also no place to retreat to if you need a minute to collect yourself when entertaining. You're on display unless you retreat to the bathroom.

PRO: Entertaining can be easier in a home with an open floor plan because hosts and hostesses are not separated from their guests or holed up in the kitchen for the entire time. An open space enables everyone to mingle and conversations to flow.

CON: Those who like to host events without showing guests all of their dirty dishes or secrets of the kitchen may dislike an open floor plan.

PRO: Light can flow effectively through an open space, minimizing dark rooms and reducing the need to install more windows. Light in and of itself can help a home feel more spacious.

CON: While light can flow easily, so can sound. Noises through the house may be amplified. A student doing homework in the dining room may be disturbed by the television blaring in the family room. Talking on the phone or even finding a quiet nook to read a book may be challenging.

PRO: Open floor plans allow for more family time together in one space than a home with a more compartmentalized layout.

CON: People who are collectors or who have a lot of furniture or accent items may find that open floor plans do not work well with this type of design mantra.

PRO: Because several rooms run into one another, colour choices for walls and furnishings in a home with an open floor plan can be limited and cohesive, making choices easier.

CON: On the flip side, those who want to incorporate different colour schemes and eclectic styles may have difficulty deciding on where to "end" rooms or how to co-mingle furniture.

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Ongoing expansion key to Winchester BMR's future

WINCHESTER – Change is taking place at a near daily rate at Winchester BMR.

Shelving is being moved around, while product is making its way from one side of the store to another, all in the name of efficiency.

Construction has been ongoing for months as the local hardware store has expanded into a one-stop shop for virtually every need a homeowner or contractor might have.

When the work is finally completed, the County Road 38 facility will incorporate a fully serviced, 7,000 square-foot drive-through system for lumber pickup and 40,000 square-feet of storage area for wood and other products

As well, the retail portion of the store will increase to approximately 23,000 square-feet, with a 7,000 square-foot garden centre area and a 5,000 square-foot outbuilding.

"All told, we'll be well over 50,000 square-feet," Ken Boje, who co-owns the local BMR with his wife Trish, said. "We'll certainly more than double our retail space, but we'll also be increasing the floor for customers, making it easier for people to pickup what they need. It is important to give [customers] a visual for what they're looking for."

The expansion efforts will bring to completion some of Boje's long held plans, which began with the purchase of what was at the time Geggie's Home Hardware in 2005. (Boje ended his affiliation with Home Hardware in 2011, choosing instead to move forward with the Quebec-based BMR.)

Since the sale eight years ago, Bob Geggie had continued ownership of the property, and operated a furniture store and mattress shop out of the adjacent building. However, in July 2012, with Geggie announcing plans to retire, Boje agreed to acquire the land and facility, setting the stage for BMR's grand entrance into Winchester.

"We're in a position to become a full-line lumber and building material outlet, while still handling an assortment of household items," Boje said.

Today, as has been the case for several months, the property is a hive of activity, with local tradesmen and employees from BMR's corporate headquarters working daily to transform the business.

What has been crucial throughout all of this, Boje added, is that the store has remained open daily, despite the construction.

"Largely, though, the worst part is over… Now it is time to start putting things back together," he said. "The challenge, though, is that stock is coming in fast."

He continued, adding that staff members are at the ready to help find the many items that have been shuffled around due to the ongoing work.

"You might not see what you're looking for on the floor, but that doesn't mean we don't have it," Boje said. "Ask employees if you can't find what you want."



Winchester BMR co-owner Ken Boje, pictured here with the store's new boom truck, expects the store's massive overhaul to largely be completed before the summer season arrives.



The local hardware store's main entrance has been expanded. *Press Photos – Uhrig*

Boutique beginnings

One of the newest features that will be added as part of BMR's expansion is the addition of the Boutique Inspiration line of merchandise. 'The selection of items includes a number of accent furniture pieces, including chairs and coffee tables, as well as throw pillows, comforters, and window treatments, and even paint colour sample displays.

"The boutique is ideal for giftware, with a modern, eclectic feel," Boje said.

Meanwhile, Winchester BMR's existing Country Treasures section has been enhanced, allowing for a greater number of products, and an increased area for various displays of country and primitive decor.

Other changes

There will be plenty for customers and contractors to expect from the revamped store.

The exterior of the building has nearly been transformed, featuring a series of windows in order to allow for natural light to flow inside. As well, a secondary driveway has been created in order to ease congestion, and keep transport trucks and other delivery vehicles away from the customer entrance and parking area.

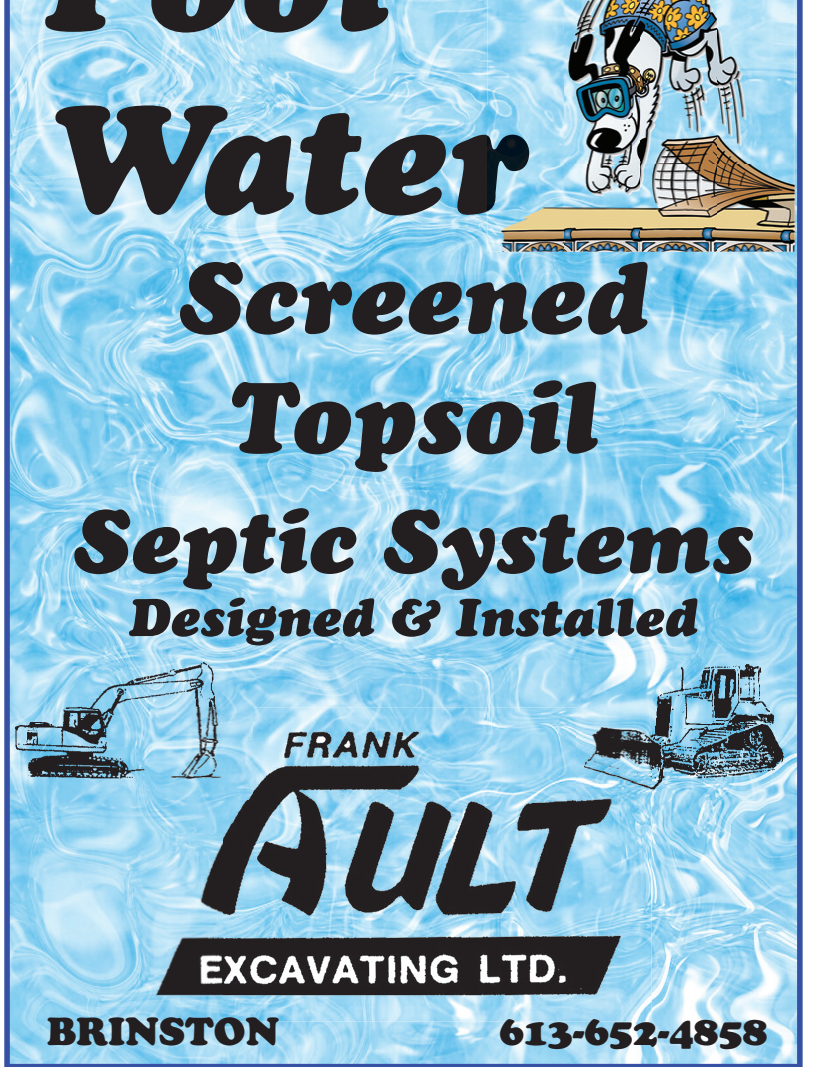
Meanwhile, Winchester BMR has expanded a number of its already intact product lines, including plumbing, lighting, flooring, and paint (BMR is the only hardware dealer in the region to stock Benjamin Moore paints), while at the same time keeping stock of household cleaning products and assorted appliances.

Other facets of the soon to-be-transformed shop include the addition of a cut room, where lumber can be cut to specific needs of customers, while Boje has also added a boom truck to the store's fleet, joining the flatbed vehicle and some forklifts.

As for when completion of Winchester BMR's expansive overhaul can be expected, Boje said he is beginning to see the light at what was once a very long tunnel.

"The various stages, I think, should be done by the end of May to mid-June. By then, we will be in pretty good shape," he said.





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Prepare the deck or patio for entertaining

Few things are better than having a functional and beautiful outdoor space to entertain guests. Having a great outdoor space enables a person to host parties or intimate gatherings all year long. Establishing an entertaining space and maintaining that space are essential when planning another year of fun in the sun.

There are many things homeowners can do to ensure their entertaining space is safe and functional. As the season approaches, include some landscaping and decorating components to your preparatory plans to make the space as comfortable and aesthetically appealing as possible.

Here are a few key tips for readying your yard for entertaining possibilities. Expand on these basics to customize an area for your unique needs:



• Check the area for any needed repairs. Prior to your first entertaining session, look over the deck or patio to take note of any flaws that may present safety hazards. Are there any loose railings? Are all screws and nails flush so they do not cause tripping? Are there any cracks in concrete or loose patio blocks? Be sure to remedy all of the repairs needed to ensure guests will be safe. If you are unsure of any structural deficits, consult with a contractor.

• Hire a reputable contractor. If you are just laying the groundwork for a new patio or deck, it is important to get the necessary permits and then hire a person who has been properly vetted. Check qualifications and licensing before hiring a contractor and ask to view a portfolio of his or her previous work. Word-of-mouth recommendations from trusted friends and family members are good, and you can also double-check qualifications by contacting the Better Business Bureau to see if any complaints have been lodged or use a service such as Angie's List to read reviews of his or her work.

• Think about closing in a portion of a deck or patio. The use of a canopy, netting or even greenery to protect an entertaining space can help minimize weather-related damage to outdoor furniture. Netting will keep a good number of biting insects at bay when the weather is warm and humid. Having a bit of concealment also means you can create a private space that isn't easily viewed by neighbours or passersby.

• Plan well-defined areas. Just as rooms serve different purposes inside of the home, outdoor areas can be separated according to usage. Establish a sitting nook where guests can gather and talk. Have a bar or serving area where refreshments are made and served. Make sure there is a shaded area for when the sun is too uncomfortable to make sitting outside enjoyable. Similarly, have a sunny area where people can soak up a few rays or dry off after a dip in the spa or pool. Don't forget to establish a spot for the kids to converge with scaled-down amenities.

• Consider a fireplace or fire pit. For centuries man (and woman) has gathered around fire for socialization and a means to warming up. Having a backyard fireplace, pit, or chiminea is a conversation-starter, a decorative focal point, and a functional tool to extend the number of seasons in which outdoor entertaining can take place. Place the fire wisely and with concern for safety. It should be out of the way of foot traffic, but central enough so that it can be a gathering point.

• Invest in quality outdoor furniture. Today's yards are extensions of a home's interior. Guests no longer want to sit on uncomfortable metal or plastic furniture. There are many different outdoor sofas and chairs that are as stylish as they are comfortable. These pieces can be matched to the decor inside your home for a cohesive look.

• Accessorize. Consider the creature comforts of indoors and mimic that outdoors. Don't shy away from hanging artwork on an exterior wall or using urns or pottery to decorate the space. Weather-resistant materials ensure everything from clocks to televisions can be used outdoors. Think about having an entire set of serving dishes and other entertaining items for the outdoors.

When refurbishing outdoor entertaining areas, emphasize comfort, safety, and functionality.

Designer tips for a cheap makeover

Would you like to make your home look designer-created, without the designer cost? You can transform many areas in the house on a budget with these five simple tips from award-winning interior decorator, Laura Stein. Additional tips to update your home are online at www.vim.ca.

Colour: Changing the colour of your walls is a budget-friendly way to breathe life into a tired space. For a clean, contemporary look, paint the walls and trim all the same colour. For a more traditional look choose a contrasting colour for your trim. Keep in mind, there is no rule that says trim has to be white.

Texture: Layer in texture and patterns by installing wallpaper. It creates a sense of sophisticated warmth and is a great way to hide imperfect walls. If you only want wallpaper on one feature wall, match the background colour of the paper to the paint in the rest of the room.

Details: Adding architectural detail not only makes a room look polished, it also adds value to your home. For example, installing crown moulding and panel moulding is an inexpensive way to get a high-end look.

Accessories: Add a fun pop of colour to your kitchen with vibrant counter appliances. Make your chosen accent colour really stand out by using kitchen accessories in the same hue.

Upgrades: You don't need a big renovation to upgrade an old kitchen. Paint the cabinets and switch out the hardware for a fresh new look. Take it a step further and add some wow-factor lighting or re-do the backsplash with fantastic mosaic tile. To help keep your backsplash and fixtures looking like new, apply a multipurpose cream cleaner, like Vim, to an old toothbrush to thoroughly clean all hard-to-reach crevices.

— News Canada

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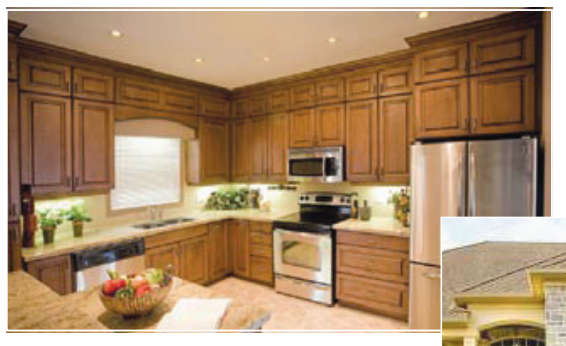
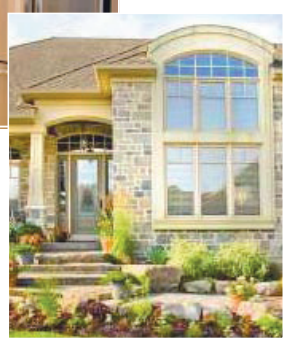
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Increase storage possibilities throughout the home

What homeowner has not lamented that they have many more belongings than they have storage space? In some homes, particularly in older homes, closet space and other areas to store items may be lacking. Apartment dwellers often find they're lacking in storage space as well. But savvy homeowners can find both permanent and temporary solutions to their home storage problems.

One of the easiest ways to create storage space is to simply remove some belongings from the residence. Go through closets around the house and pick through the attic and/or garage to see if there are any items that can be discarded or donated. Items that are broken can be discarded, while those things that still have utility can be donated or sold.

The next step is to maximize the space of your existing closets. Many closets are equipped with just a shelf and a clothing rack, greatly limiting the storage potential. Investing in a closet organization system is one way to transform a poorly utilized space. These systems can be purchased, often inexpensively, from a home improvement centre. Compiled of modular racks and shelving, the positioning can be customized depending on the size of the closet. Oftentimes, the addition of shelving or another rack for hanging clothes can solve some storage issues. These closet systems also are ideal for renters because they can be installed with minimal damage and be removed when a lease expires.

Homeowners may have to think vertically to solve storage solutions. Wall space may be abundant in a home where closets are not. Therefore, shelving and cabinets can be places to keep items neatly off the floor. A series of shelves can be installed next to a washing machine to keep laundry supplies organized. In children's rooms, build bookcases the height of the room so children can store frequently used reading material and toys on the lower levels, and adults can put collectibles and mementos near the top. Hang hooks to hold hats and robes. Whenever possible, look to store items on the walls where they will keep clutter off the floor.



Messy closets and clutter elsewhere in the home may be indicative of a storage deficit. But there are ways to easily increase storage space.

Storage can even be created in the bathroom, where the space over the toilet can be used to hang a cabinet to store hand towels and other toiletries if the space under the sink has already been claimed.

Many apartment dwellers recognize the advantage of having items that serve double-duty in their living spaces. For example, a convertible sofa can be used for sitting and then turn into a bed for overnight guests. Ottomans that have a storage compartment can house anything from throw blankets to magazines. An armoire may house the television but also have a pull-out shelf that can hold a laptop computer.

In the kitchen, move food items out of cabinetry and into a "pantry" you create elsewhere in the house, such as a laundry room or garage. This frees up more room for pots and pans. Cabinets that have pull-out shelving help maximize tight recesses of cabinets and keep things organized and in sight. For those with limited cabinets, pots and pans can be hung from a pot rack suspended in the kitchen.

Even when there is a small amount of storage space, individuals can find clever ways to neatly store items.

Six home and renovation flicks

There are so many people who are anxious to get knee-deep in home improvement projects. Still others are more than happy to leave the work to a professional and sit back and enjoy the results. Those who choose to hire a contractor can certainly get their fill of home improvement projects by watching films where homes or renovations are central to the plot.



Money Pit

No list would be complete without including this movie starring Tom Hanks and Shelley Long, who attempt to renovate a mansion only to be met with disaster after disaster.

The Notebook

Nicholas Sparks' novel turned into this unforgettable, romantic film is a love story at its core. However, the renovation of a Victorian home in the Carolinas is also central to the story and makes for amazing imagery.

Poltergeist

This movie showcases what can go wrong when a home takes on a life of its own as malevolent ghosts take over.

Under the Tuscan Sun

While renovating a home might be considered interesting, doing so in the remote beauty of the Italian countryside makes for a much more visually appealing film.

House of Sand and Fog

A woman is evicted from her home after it is wrongly repossessed and auctioned. Together with a sheriff's deputy the woman begins harassing the new owners of the home in an attempt to get back her residence.

Field of Dreams

Although it is not the house that is getting a makeover, but rather the fields behind this impressive farmhouse, viewers can be mesmerized by the magic that ensues afterward.

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Home maintenance check list for spring time

Warm weather and an inevitable build-up of rain and melting snow make spring a particularly important time to perform a series of home maintenance checks.

Maintenance is an essential part of being a home owner, ensuring the internal environment of your house stays healthy. It's also a necessary part of maintaining your new home warranty if you live in a house or condominium that is less than seven years old.

All new homes in Ontario come with a warranty that lasts seven years from the date of the first possession. This warranty is guaranteed by Tarion Warranty Corporation. It protects you from things like water penetration through the basement or foundation walls, defects in the electrical, plumbing and heating systems and major structural damage. Here are a few tips to make sure your home stays in good shape and stays covered by warranty:



• Regularly clear eavestroughs and gutters of debris. Leaves and sticks that accumulate through fall and winter can cause blockages.

• Be sure to extend downspouts so that water is directed away from your home. Melting snow and rain can accumulate quickly and water that flows around the foundation could eventually find its way into the basement.

• Fix the caulking and weather stripping around windows and doors and on the roof if it becomes cracked or separated.

• Remove the winter cover from your air conditioner and following the manufacturer's instructions, inspect, vacuum, brush outdoor coils and wash or clean the filter. Service as needed.

• Investigate and identify any musty smells and odours. They are often an indicator that there is a hidden moisture problem.

• Clean or replace your furnace filter.

• Check air ducts, remove covers and vacuum dust from vents.

• Have your roof inspected regularly to ensure shingles, flashing and chimney caps are in place and sealed properly.

• If you have a sump pump, check the float and discharge line and test the overall operation.

More information about your home's warranty is available online at www.tarion.com.

– News Canada

Managing your new home warranty is just a click away

Buying a new home is an exciting and busy time – and while managing a new home warranty may not be at the top of the long to-do list, it is an essential part of maintaining this major purchase.

All new houses and condominiums in Ontario come with a warranty that lasts seven years from the date of the first possession, guaranteed by Tarion Warranty Corporation. Coverage includes deposit protection, protection against defects in work and materials, unauthorized substitutions and against delayed closings or delayed occupancies without proper notice. For condominiums, warranty coverage also includes shared areas of the building.

Once you take possession of your new home, you have 30 days to submit your first warranty claim, so it's important to be on top of those deadlines. The easiest way to do that is to register for Tarion's web-based service, MyHome.

Your account will take care of many of the tasks associated with managing your warranty, such as remembering deadlines and keeping track of the correspondence. It also allows you to:

• Securely submit the most common forms: 30-day, year-end, and second-year;

• View forms submitted to, and official correspondence received from, Tarion;

• Receive email alerts with personalized warranty timelines, including key due dates for form submission and inspection requests;

• Access key warranty information specific to your home and manage it all in one safe, secure place.

If you have purchased a new home from a builder or a resale home that is less than seven years old, you can register for your MyHome account by visiting www.tarion.com and following the link on the homepage. You will need to provide your home's enrolment number and original date of possession (the warranty start date), which can be found on the Tarion Certificate of Completion and Possession (CCP), provided by your builder.

Although personalized email alerts will make the warranty process easier, homeowners still need to do their part by fully understanding their warranty rights. The Homeowner Information Package, which is given to you by your builder and also available online, contains everything you need to know.

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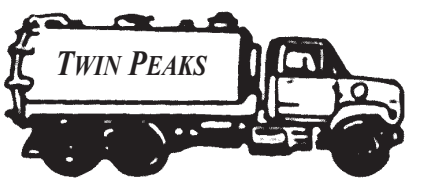

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Cost-effective and eco-friendly home improvements



Installing high-efficiency water fixtures, including a low-flow showerhead, is an affordable and eco-friendly home improvement project.

Homeowners take on projects to improve their homes for a variety of reasons. Some may do so to make a home more functional, while others may do so to improve their home's resale value.

Some homeowners take on a home improvement project to make their homes more eco-friendly. Such projects are often mistakenly assumed to be costly undertakings, but there are several cost-effective ways to make a home more eco-friendly.

Upgrade your appliances

A home improvement project does not have to require the use of a hammer and nails or the hiring of a contractor. A simple home improvement project like upgrading older appliances, including the washer and dryer, to newer, more efficient models can give a home a fresh look while reducing energy consumption. That reduction in energy consumption is a byproduct of the stricter standards placed on manufacturers who must adhere to guidelines to produce products that are more energy-efficient.

For example, today's energy-efficient refrigerators will use less than half the energy of models made as recently as 15 years ago.

Add more insulation

Adding more insulation or replacing older insulation used to be an especially laborious process. However, in many instances insulation can now be added or upgraded to a home without any major reconstruction or demolition, reducing the cost of the project considerably. Adding more insulation to a home can reduce energy consumption in the winter, when the home will feel warmer and allow you to keep the thermostat at a more reasonable number.

Install high-efficiency water fixtures

Few people think about how much water they consume over the course of a typical day, but the figures might be eye-opening to those who hope to adopt a more eco-friendly lifestyle. It's generally accepted that the average person uses between 80 and 100 gallons of water each day. Showers seem to be especially wasteful, as older shower heads might be using as much as five gallons per minute, or 50 gallons of water during a 10-minute shower.

Older fixtures that consume such massive amounts of water can be easily and affordably replaced with newer, more efficient fixtures. Today's high-efficiency low-flow showerheads can provide a strong shower stream while reducing water consumption. Such showerheads are also less taxing on your water heater, reducing your energy consumption as a result. Homeowners can also install high-efficiency toilets that use as little as 1.3 gallons of water per flush (compared to older models that consumed as many as five gallons per flush).

Install a programmable thermostat

Programmable thermostats present another affordable way to improve a home and benefit the environment. Some of today's programmable thermostats can record personal preferences and usage and determine the best course of action for heating and cooling your home. Temperatures can be adjusted room-by-room, and the programmable thermostat allows homeowners to control their heating and cooling while they're out of the house, ensuring they're not paying to heat or cool an empty house and wasting energy in doing so.

Home improvement projects don't have to be a grand undertaking, particularly when a homeowner's goal is to make a home more eco-friendly.



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Garage organization 101

Garages are coveted by homeowners across the country, offering a space to park a car and protect it from the elements. But many people do not park a car in their garage, only to find the garage becomes a home to clutter.

Garages tend to become the official catch-all of a home. When an item cannot be crammed into a hiding space elsewhere, it often ends up dumped into the garage, where it joins the long list of other abandoned items. It can be easy to let garages become a wasteland because everything put inside a garage is behind a closed door. That mess can quickly build up, and reclaiming your garage requires energy, time, organization, and a plan.

Organizing a garage will take some time. An entire weekend or two consecutive days may be necessary depending on the level of disarray. Taking everything out of the garage and going through the sorting process may take the most time. When sorting, separate any broken items which need to be discarded. Examine things that you have not used in some time. If you haven't missed it, there's a good chance that you can discard the item or donate it. Create separate piles for donations and trash.

Move the items that will be kept into a separate pile. After all of the trash and donations are removed from the premises, then you can look at what is remaining and begin planning out a more organized storage system.

There may be things in the "keep" pile that are simply out of place in the garage and may be better stored elsewhere. Think about which items can be moved to a basement or attic because of their infrequency of use, such as holiday decorations, suitcases, and collectibles. You may prefer to move lawn and garden items out of the garage and into a shed in the backyard.

After completing the sorting process, look at the garage as a blank space and measure out the room that you have. This will provide an empty canvas as a starting off point. To maximize the amount of space you have as a work area or a place to park your car, invest in as many tools as possible to utilize vertical space. Shelving, hooks and cabinetry will take things off of the floor, while storage units with doors can hide items that lack aesthetic appeal. Rolling tool caddies and cabinets can keep all tools neat and in organized drawers so you're never hunting and pecking for a tool again. A cabinet that has a lock and key can be utilized for dangerous chemicals that need to be kept out of the hands of children and away from pets. Think about how the garage will appear from the curb when the door is raised and create a design that will be functional and neat.



Even a home that looks neat from the outside may be housing a disorganized mess behind the garage door.

Take the opportunity while the garage is empty to give walls and floors a fresh coat of paint and improve the lighting in the garage. A brighter garage makes for a better work station.

For those who can use a little extra help, there are professional garage organization companies that can come in and install custom cabinetry and work surfaces. This is an option if you desire a high-end garage.

When putting items back into the garage, label where everything is stored until you become accustomed to the new organization. This way you'll be able to find everything easily.

Organizing a garage can be tedious, but the reward is ultimately worth the effort.

Prevent pressure washing injuries this season

Exposure to the elements can take its toll on the exterior of a home. Dirt, mold and mildew can compromise the look of a home and yard, which is why many people begin the spring season by dusting off the pressure-washing machine and making resolutions to strip the dirt off of siding, furniture and patios. However, serious injuries can result if a pressure washer is used improperly. Getting schooled in pressure-washer safety is essential to preventing a trip to the emergency room.

It can be easy to underestimate the power of a pressure washer. An electric-powered machine may generate up to 1,000 pounds per square inch (psi) of water pressure.

Gas-powered machines are even more dynamic, offering pressure up to 4,000 psi. That force coupled with wet surfaces can easily cause falls, slips and abrasions.

Pressure washers may even cause blindness when chemical cleaners are used in conjunction with the pressure washer.

It is adviseable to leave pressure washing to a professional. However, for homeowners who do choose to try this cleaning method, safety precautions are essential.

• Dress properly by donning rubber-soled shoes to prevent slips on wet surfaces.

• Wear protective eyewear to shield the eyes from any projectiles or injury from the water spray itself.

• Wear sturdy gloves with grips so you can have a firm hold on the nozzle while cleaning.

• Be sure to read all of the safety precautions and operation instructions in the manual prior to operating the pressure washer. Do not use a washer if the instruction manual is missing.

• Remove any debris surrounding the area you will be cleaning. This may include sticks, rocks, toys, and any other items that can be blown around with the pressure washer spray.

• Use a safety harness if you will be using a pressure washer while on a ladder or elevated surface.

• To lessen the chance of high-pressure injection (HPI), which is when water and other debris penetrates the skin resulting in deep-tissue damage, broaden the spray on the nozzle so it isn't piercing like a needle. HPI can cause infections so great that they may require amputation.

• Use an extension cord that is water-resistant and acceptable for outdoor use. Ensure there are no breaks in the cord to minimize the chance for electrocution.

• Avoid hot water and steam pressure washers to eliminate the chance for burns.

Thousands of people are estimated to be hospitalized due to pressure-washer injuries.

Many of these injuries can be prevented simply by heeding safety precautions and following the rules of operation.

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Operate garage doors safely to prevent injury

A garage door is an oft-overlooked part of a home. Some are rarely opened, while others are used on a daily basis. Though they might be overlooked, garage doors play a role in thousands of injuries every year.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian hospitals report that roughly 60 percent of all garage door injuries are cut fingers or hands. The majority of injuries happen at a person's own home.

Although children are more susceptible to garage door injuries, these injuries can happen to people of all ages. That is why it is wise for all members of the family to familiarize themselves with how to prevent garage door injuries.

Crushing concerns

Safety experts from many organizations, including CPSC, estimate the average garage door weighs more than 400 pounds. A door of that weight can break bones and crush adults and children alike. There are many reasons a door can fall, including lost tension, improper installation or a faulty track or springs. A garage door may become faulty if it was hit by an automobile and not mended correctly.

Many different manufacturers have created safety features that can be installed on garage doors to control the speed of descent and also automatically stop a garage door should it be involved in a free fall. There also are features that retract the door should it meet with an obstacle on the ground when the door is closing.

> Educate family members on dangers associated with garage doors

Unsafe ride-along

Some children and teenagers think it is entertaining to ride on the garage door when it is automatically being opened. The kids let go before the door reaches the header of the garage. Unfortunately, many children are not as lucky and can become trapped between the garage door and the small space at the ceiling of the garage. Others may have hands or feet become stuck between the folding panel joints of the door, resulting in breaks or amputations.

Children should be advised never to ride on an opening garage door. Some automatic garage door opener manufacturers have begun developing safety systems that shut down the operation of the door if a sensor measures extra weight on the garage door.

Sharp edges

Tracks on standard garage doors are frequently made of sharp-edged metal and have numerous open holes in the construction that are tempting for little fingers. Cuts have occurred to both children and adults in and around tracks. Look for garage doors that have rounded-out edges on the track and a closed design that does not enable fingers to be trapped between rolling mechanisms and the garage door track.

Open joints in door

Most standard garage doors are made by fitting several panels together to create a solid door. This allows for the bending motion of the door when it is retracted. Gaps between these panels, called joints, can trap fingers or toes, resulting in anything from pinching to amputations. Shoppers may want to consider a door that guards against open joints with protective features that do not allow finger entry between joints.

Other safety precautions

• Do not leave the garage door partially open. When it is reactivated, it first may travel downward before retracting back upward.

• Test the auto-reversing feature of the garage door monthly by placing a roll of paper towels beneath the door. If the door does not reverse upon contact with the towels, have the door repaired or replaced.

• Make sure that no snow or ice is blocking the door during cold weather. In addition, check for other obstructions that could make the door work incorrectly.

• Do not let young children play in the garage unattended. Not only can a garage door be a hazard, but also carbon monoxide poisoning in the garage is another serious concern.

• Regularly clean the working parts of the garage door to ensure safe operation.

• Do not try to fix garage door problems on your own. Serious injuries can ensue when the torque on springs and other mechanisms are adjusted improperly on high-tension parts. Hire a professional to get the job done right.

• Educate children and other family members of all the dangers associated with garage doors so they will know how to use them safely.



Garage doors need to be inspected for safety and used properly to avoid injuries.

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Cleaning and maintaining carpeted floors

Much like paint, carpeting can quickly transform the look of a room. Carpeting can be a durable flooring material, but it will need upkeep to look its best.

Carpeting that will be in high-traffic areas, such as halls and entryways, may require the most TLC. Routine vacuuming is necessary to dislodge dust and dirt particles. But at some point a more thorough cleaning may be necessary.

Vacuuming

Frequent vacuuming will prolong the life of the carpet by preventing a buildup of particles inside of the carpet fiber that can eventually cause friction and sever carpet fibers. Use of a crevice tool and other attachments can enable cleaning in the corners where the carpet meets baseboards and mouldings. When vacuuming larger rooms, divide the room into separate areas and tackle each area separately before moving on to another portion of the room.

Take time when vacuuming carpet. Plush carpets will trap dirt more easily than a thinner or less dense carpet, so more passes of the vacuum might be necessary. Overlap strokes in a crisscross pattern to get at dirt at different angles.

Pet hair and vacuumed particles of food can create odour inside of the vacuum bag. Therefore, think about adding baking soda or an odour-relieving product designed to be used when vacuuming.

Treating spills

Spills are one thing that homeowners in carpeted homes may fear. If not addressed quickly, liquid or food may permanently damage a carpet. It is adviseable to manage a spill as soon as it happens to reduce the likelihood that it will contribute to a permanent stain. Carefully blot up the spill until much of the offending item is removed before adding any type of cleaning agent. Test the cleaning product in an inconspicuous area prior to using it on the spill to ensure it will not damage or discolour the carpet.



Addressing spills quickly can prevent stains from soiling a carpet.

Work from the outside of the stain and move inward to keep the stain from spreading outward. Use a plush, white towel to blot up any remaining moisture and spill. The towel also will help to fluff up the pile of the carpet.

Remove shoes

Dirt and germs can be tracked into the house on the bottom of shoes. Eventually this material can be deposited on carpets, which then becomes lodged inside the fibers. To reduce the amount of dirt tracked in, make it a rule to take off shoes upon entering the house. If pets are the culprits of tracked-in dirt, keep a towel by the door and wipe the animal's paws before allowing it to roam through the house.

Steam clean to refresh

If you don't already own a steam-cleaner, they can be rented for a fraction of the cost of buying one. Together with steam, a cleaning solution is usually part of the procedure. The steam and cleaning product will loosen and dissolve dirt and then the dirty remains will be sucked up into a receptacle to be emptied. Steam cleaning is one of the easiest methods of thoroughly cleaning carpeting and reviving it to look as good as new. Many homeowners are quite surprised to see how much dirt can be removed from the carpet by using a steam-cleaner.

Intermittent use of a steam spot cleaner can help keep high-traffic areas of the home and stairs clean or treat a persistent stain that doesn't respond to hand cleaning.

Use area rugs

There is a misconception that area rugs are used in lieu of carpeting, but both can be used together. An area rug may be placed near an entryway to catch dirt from shoes before it is tracked elsewhere in the house. Area rugs can be used under a dining table where the frequent pulling out and pushing in of chairs may wear down carpeting.

Eliminate static

Static electricity can plague people who live in homes with carpeting, especially during cool, dry weather. Placing a dryer sheet on the bottom of a dry sponge mop and then running it over the carpet can alleviate static. This will help prevent those annoying shocks or even damage to electronic equipment from static shocks.

Carpeting is something that can make a statement in a home. When maintained, it can look beautiful for years to come.

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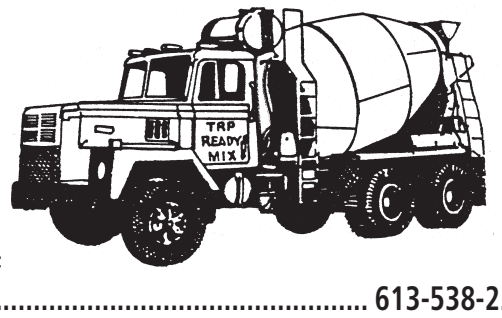
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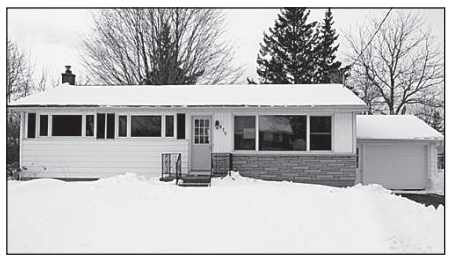

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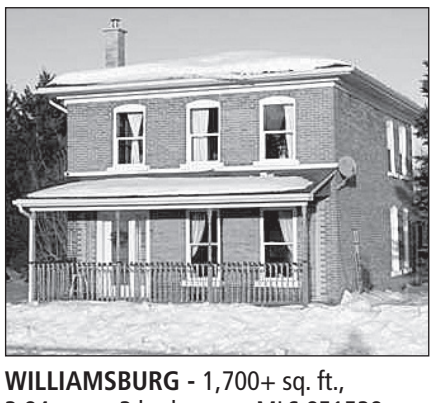

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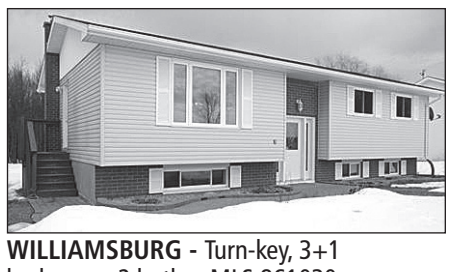

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Spring 2013 focus on real estate

How to conquer clutter

When it comes to getting organized, it can be very daunting to walk through each room in your home and look at project after project that needs attention.

Instead of approaching getting organized as one enormous task, Phil Dorner, president of the Ontario Real Estate Association suggests breaking up the work into a series of mini-projects.

"Mini-projects can be more manageable for busy homeowners and the satisfaction you feel when you complete these tasks can help motivate you to finish the job."

Here are Dorner's top tricks to cutting clutter and getting your home looking and feeling organized:

• **Tackle one mess (and one room) at a time:** Prevent getting overwhelmed by attacking one room at a time. Dedicate a few hours each week to getting one room sorted and you'll surprise yourself with how organized you feel after a few short weeks.

• **Box it up:** Start three piles – store, toss and donate. Go through closets, cabinets and cupboards and start sorting. With the exception of seasonal items (that should be stored in airtight bins when not in use), if you haven't touched an item in over three months, consider getting rid of it.

• **Buy organizers:** For use within closets and cabinets. For example, keep kitchen spices readily available with a spice shelf, or hang a shoe organizer behind a closet door to reduce clutter on closet and bedroom floors.

• **Organize entryway:** Entryways are one of the most cluttered areas of the home due to lack of space, lots of stuff and traffic. Get shoes off the floor and onto a shoe rack or bin. Place a coat rack or hooks to hang outerwear and umbrellas.

• **Get ruthless:** Limit clutter on tables, countertops and flat surfaces by designating spots for things like keys, mail, etc. Keep décor items simple and free of dust. Remember, less is more!

• **Designate drawers:** Assign drawers in cabinets, desks and dressers for a specific purpose. For example, assign a desk drawer as a "homework only" zone.

For many busy parents, it can feel like you are constantly picking up after your kids. Counter this by getting kids in on the action. By teaching children how to be organized, they will learn to treat their belongings with respect. A good rule to institute with your kids is the "in-out rule." For every new item, get your child to help decide on an old one to discard.

"Not only does clearing out clutter help you get organized, but it's one of the best ways to present your home in a good light. Homes that are cluttered look messy and extra stuff ends up collecting dust, which impacts air quality, not to mention aesthetics," says Dorner.

When you're in the process of preparing to sell your home, organization should be top priority. "By getting rid of clutter you are in effect de-personalizing your home, which is one of the most critical components of preparing a home for sale."



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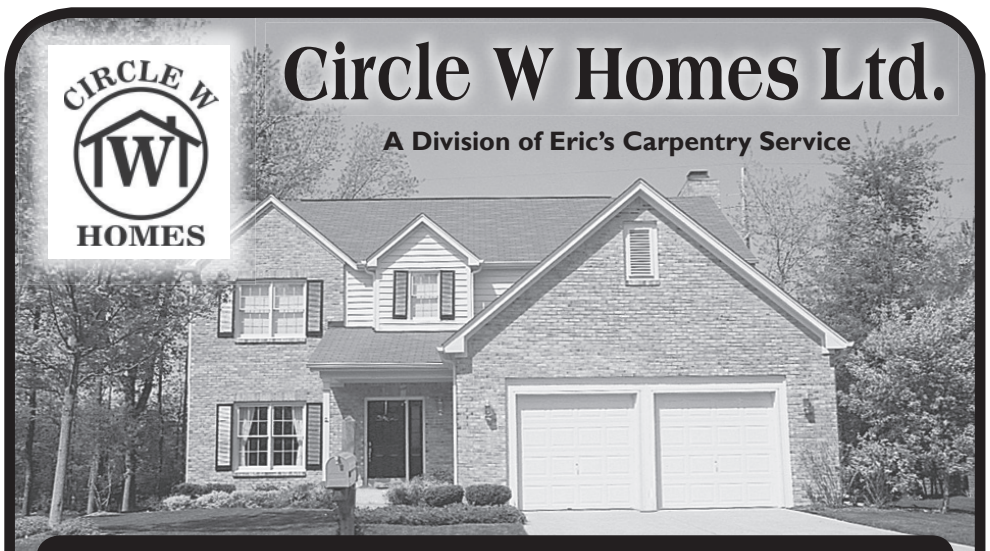

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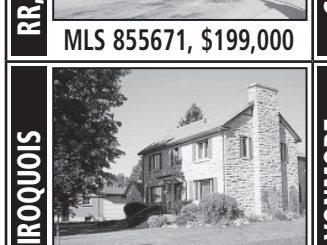

IROQUOIS
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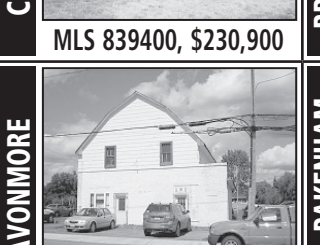

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Spring 2013 **focus on real estate**

Who is responsible for repairs during a home sale?

Many questions arise during the home-buying process. Buyers looking at homes that require a good deal of TLC may wonder who is responsible for the home's repairs. Depending on the situation, there is no clear-cut answer.

There is no perfect home, and things that are acceptable to the current owner may not be acceptable to the buyer who is looking to become the next owner. The home-buying process is typically a careful cooperation between buyer and seller to find a middle ground. The buyer may have to make some concessions, as will the seller. Ultimately, it is this cooperation that often determines if the sale goes through or is terminated.

Before any negotiations can begin regarding repairs, it is advisable for a buyer to have an independent inspector come out and look over the home and property. Most real estate agents will suggest this be done as a first priority – even before a contract is entered on the home. An inspection will unveil any potential problems in a home and indicate things that the buyer may not be aware of, including items that do not meet with code or could be unsafe. An inspector also may point out problems that could cause a mortgage lender to give pause. This may mean the lender will deem problems unsafe and refuse to fund the mortgage until repairs are made.

A copy of this inspection report should be sent to the home seller to review with his or her attorney and real estate agent. The buyer working with his own real estate attorney and agent can petition for certain repairs to be made. Many sellers will make such repairs to ensure the purchase goes through, or they will accept a lower purchase price to compensate for the needed repairs, which the buyer will then make.

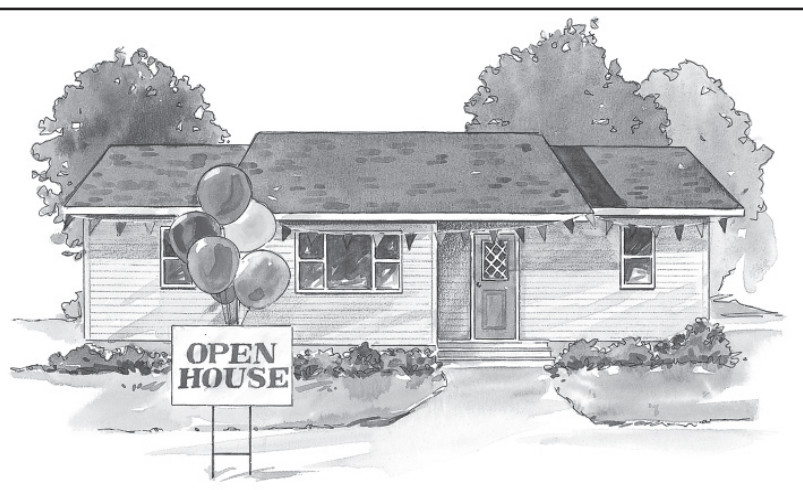
Buyers might want to hire a good real estate attorney to write clauses into the contract to protect their interests. This allows the buyer to forfeit the sale and walk away from the contract should an issue arise.

The rules often change when buying a home that is a short sale or in foreclosure. A home that is in distress is typically in this situation because the current owners cannot afford to pay their mortgage, and thusly, are not able to afford repairs. According to Think Glink, a money-management Web site, buyers may try to negotiate repairs with the seller, but they shouldn't assume that sellers (or lenders in the event of a bank-owned home) are responsible for the repairs. Generally speaking, most short sales and foreclosures are sold "as is" and may even specify that repairs and requirements for the certificate of occupancy are the buyer's responsibility. A buyer also can ask to have the home price reduced to cover the repairs. But foreclosures are often already deeply discounted.

Buyers should know that, for a home that is not in foreclosure, there are some repairs that should ultimately be the responsibility of the seller. If these repairs are not made, a buyer should think strongly about walking away from the deal, according to Why6Percent.com, a real estate marketing site. Such repairs include:

• lender-required repairs that could impact home safety
• leaky pipes
• water penetration issues, including a bad roof
• unsafe decking or handrails
• wet basements or crawl spaces
• unsecure foundations or obvious structural damage
• poorly functioning sewer lines or septic system

It is always advisable for buyers to speak with a reliable real estate attorney and a trusted real estate agent to guide them through the process of buying a home. These people can help buyers navigate the important decisions that can affect the home they'll be living in for the next several years.



Preparing for an open house

If you are thinking about selling your home this spring, preparing for an open house is likely on your to-do list. Open houses are an excellent way to showcase your home and when done right, can really ignite interest and help you achieve your end goal of a speedy sale.

According to Phil Dorner, president of the Ontario Real Estate Association an open house can be an incredible sales tool but homeowners need to be sure that they put their best foot forward.

"Often, you only get one chance to make an impression on potential buyers so make sure that your home is in tip top shape for the open house. I can't count the number of times that I've had serious buyers go through an open house and be turned off by messes, clutter and signs of disrepair," says Dorner.

Once a buyer makes up their mind that a property isn't for them, it is nearly impossible to turn them around so guarantee that buyers get the best first impression of your home by following these simple steps:

• Make sure your home is spotless.
• Keep clutter to a minimum and put away personal belongings like family photos, etc.
• Make sure that you don't just throw excess belongings into closets – get organized first, otherwise buyers will think your home is lacking in storage.
• Ensure home inspection reports, appraisals and documents describing major repairs and warranties are easily accessible.
• Make sure that vehicles are removed from the driveway and that there is room alongside your property for parking.
• Talk to your realtor about signs and additional marketing opportunities for your open house.

"If there is one thing for homeowners to keep in mind when it comes to preparing for an open house, it's that the devil is in the details."

"Not only are potential buyers picky but they are likely visiting a number of other houses on the same day so the time that they can spend in your home is limited. To make sure that you make the best impression possible, do a walk-through of your home with your realtor and listen to what they have to say about the areas that need attention – fresh eyes can help pick out things that you may be so used to seeing that you don't even really see them, so to speak."

"A well-executed open house should get potential buyers back in and that means offers on the table," says Dorner.

For additional information on preparing for an open house, visit www.howrealtorshelp.ca.

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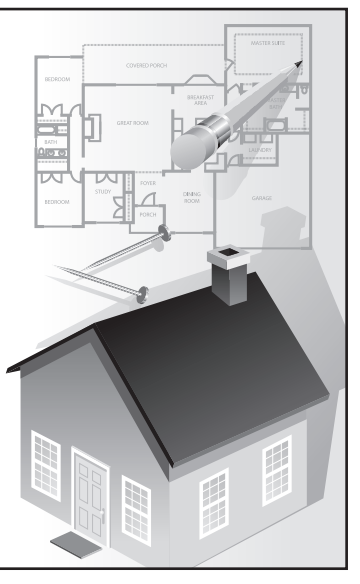



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Spring 2013 focus on real estate

Understanding real estate terminology

When it comes to real estate, there is no shortage of terminology and plenty of room for confusion. From mortgage types and periods to title searches and conditions, there are countless variables to consider in every real estate transaction.

Ron Abraham, president of the Ontario Real Estate Association says that buyers and sellers needn't be overwhelmed by any of the terms; rather, they should focus on the big picture and let their realtor work through the details.

"For both buyers and sellers, the sheer volume of information and options can be a little overwhelming. However, it's important that both buyers and sellers focus on the larger picture. If you have a clear idea of your needs and go in with realistic expectations, the whole process will be very rewarding."

Here is a cheat sheet of a few common real estate terms:

Fixed-rate Mortgage: A set amount is paid each month. The interest payable is predetermined and fixed at the time of taking the loan, and holds for the entire term. Buyers are protected from any increase in prime lending rates in future.

Variable-rate Mortgage: An adjustable interest rate, which can be altered depending on the market situation. These loans may be beneficial if there is a sudden fall in lending rates, but higher interest rates mean greater monthly payments.

Amortization: The number of years it takes to repay the entire amount of the mortgage.

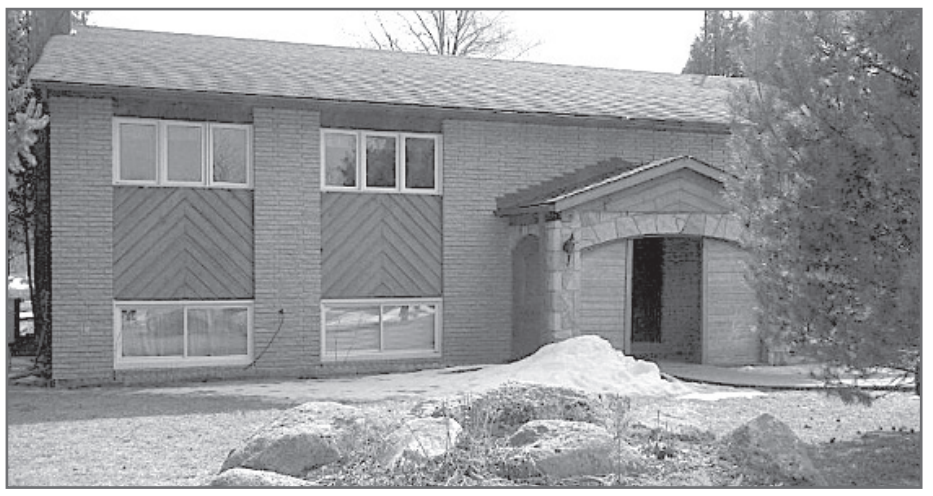
Title/Title Search: Title is the legal evidence of ownership in a property. A Title Search is a detailed examination of the ownership documents to ensure there are no liens or other encumbrances on the property, and no questions regarding the seller's ownership claim.

Conditions: Sometimes called a "Subject-to" Clause. A statement of a condition to be fulfilled before the contract will become firm and binding; must include a specific deadline for removal.

Multiple Listing Service (MLS): A current and comprehensive listing system for relaying property information. This service offers the widest exposure to properties listed for sale.

Realtors: Real estate professionals licensed by the Real Estate Council of Ontario who are members of the various Real Estate Boards and the Ontario and Canadian Real Estate Associations.

Abraham adds, "Often people get tripped up when it comes to sifting through information surrounding financing options, as well as the nuts and bolts of the real estate transaction. Talk to your realtor about the best way to get equipped with the information you need to make a buying or selling decision that is right for you and your family."



Spectacular spot!

Tucked away with its own waterfront on Flagg Bay with views of the main channel of the St. Lawrence River. This private full-acre property is conveniently located between Morrisburg and Iroquois, offering six golf courses, several hospitals and medical clinics and endless shopping within a 25-minute drive, as well as the complete amenities of both Morrisburg and Iroquois within a 5-minute drive. Park the boat at your own dock, relax on the deck while looking out over the water. Economical climate control supplied by the heat pump. Some upgrading may be required to satisfy your taste but this is a solid waterfront opportunity that is too good to be missed, take a look today! ***MORRISBURG $310,000***

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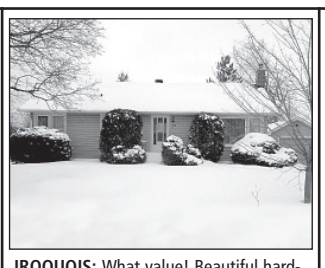
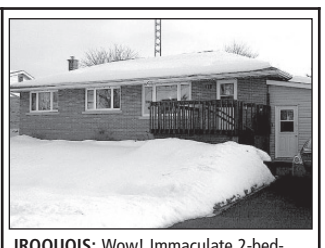
MORRISBURG: Excellent opportunity to move into the convenient and popular mobile park in Morrisburg. Move-in ready with many recent upgrades including: gas furnace, central air, gas fireplace and carport. Very well-kept and upgraded, lots of storage, take a look, you will be impressed!!! **$47,900**


IROQUOIS: What value! Beautiful hardwood floors, upgraded windows, gas furnace (2012), central air and 2.5 baths. Great curb appeal featuring a very attractive interlock drive and walkway, stone work around the flower beds, large lot and backed by the park. All amenities close by. **$159,500**


IROQUOIS: Wow! Immaculate 2-bedroom brick bungalow on a large lot in a great neighbourhood with a limited view of the St. Lawrence River. Offering gas heat, central air, attached garage, paved drive, central vacuum, front and rear decks. Updates include: windows, some flooring and insulation, appliances included. **$174,900**


WILLIAMSBURG: This huge 2,200 sq. ft. home sits on 62 acres with mostly tillable land with some recreational. Property is on a good paved road and also backs onto a creek. The house does need quite a bit of updating but has a new bathroom on second level and the roof has been reshingled. Call today! **$185,000**


MORRISBURG AREA: WOW! 5 bedrooms, country style eat-in kitchen, amazing living room with woodstove, formal dining room and inviting foyer. The entire home boasts high ceilings and fabulous original woodwork. This 2-storey brick Victorian has large decks front and back, great storage barn and a basement workshop with an outside entrance. Just minutes from Morrisburg, it is a must see! **$182,000**


MORRISBURG: Brand new! Very bright and spacious 3-bedroom bungalow in Morrisburg. Beautiful open living space boasting dark maple cabinets including island, ceramic floors in kitchen, dining and foyer area, large living room with hardwood flooring and gas fireplace. Comes with New Home Warranty & Manufacturer Warranty. **$299,500**

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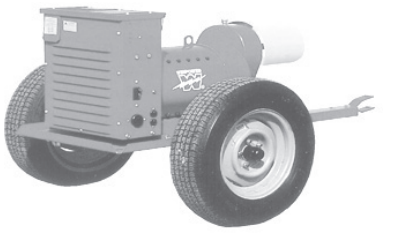

Spring 2013 **focus on real estate**

Be mortgage-free sooner

Mortgages are the primary source of household debt in Canada and paying off one's mortgage is top of mind for most homeowners.

According to Ron Abraham, president of the Ontario Real Estate Association, most mortgages in Canada are paid over a 25-year period and while mortgages are considered "good debt" because homes are valuable assets that tend to appreciate over time, the quicker you can pay off your mortgage, the better off you are.

"Many people don't realize that even if you are within the term of your mortgage, it is worthwhile to keep up to date on interest rates and new mortgage options. Sometimes looking into refinancing makes sense, while other times, it's more about bootstrapping and enacting some tried and true strategies to quickening the repayment process," says Abraham.

Here are some tips to ramp up your mortgage repayment plan:

1. Switch to bi-weekly payments – Instead of paying your mortgage on a monthly or semi-monthly basis (12 or 24 payments per year, respectively), opt for a bi-weekly payment schedule, or a total of 26 payments each year. The extra payments will take years off your amortization schedule.

2. Increase payments – Every dollar counts when it comes to paying off your mortgage. For an additional $50-$100 a month, you can shave years off your mortgage and save thousands of dollars in interest. Many lenders will let you increase your payment by up to 20% every year, so when your income increases, you can also increase your payments.

3. Contribute to your RRSP – By contributing regularly to your RRSP, not only will you reduce your tax burden, you can put your tax refund directly towards your mortgage. This will help ensure that you will have a stable retirement and will help fast-track your journey to be mortgage-free.

4. Make an annual lump sum payment – Most banks will allow you to make an extra mortgage payment each year, which is applied directly to the principal. Take advantage of this by making a lump sum payment – no matter how big or small, everything you can do will make a difference.

Not only does paying down the principal get your mortgage paid off faster but it will save you thousands of dollars of interest in the long term.

However, Abraham reminds homeowners that these days, mortgages tend to be low interest and are "good debt," so if there are more pressing issues like credit card debt or lack of a rainy day fund, it is important to evaluate your financial priorities.

Abraham recommends speaking to your financial advisor before making any major changes to your financial strategy and keeping in tune with new mortgage trends and information on interest rates.

Choosing your family's real estate agent

How important is your health to you? Your teeth? Your car? Your legal affairs? Most people rate these as very important to their lives, and they very carefully decide who they can best trust in handling the care of these essentials. Most families have a long-term family doctor, dentist, mechanic, and lawyer who they look to, first, for these matters. Many families also have their own family Realtor® to guide them through the buying and selling processes.

Many local families we deal with call us for a diverse range of information and services that we can provide. We are regularly consulted regarding the sale or purchase of homes and land, but also business or farm sale and purchases, land acquisition, housing developments, estate planning, future real estate investments, income producing properties, divorce settlements, or estate issues regarding real estate. Sometimes, people call just for general advice or cursory financial or legal advice on property values.

To have your own personal, family Realtor® is important. Having a trusted, competent professional that you, your extended family, and the people you care about can rely on for confidential advice is even more important. We are grateful to have so many of our customers as repeat or referred clients, from grandparents down to grandchildren of age, we treat them all as friends and neighbours.

Ask your lawyer or friends who they use. Look around and see who has the experience, knowledge, and reputation that you would want to be associated with. When you find that Realtor®, seek their help and advice for all the things mentioned. Call them first, before you do any real estate activities – anywhere... Dundas, SD&G, Ottawa, Eastern Ontario, even worldwide. The Oldford Team of Butch Oldford, Clayton Oldford, Nathan Lang, and our administrative staff are here to help!

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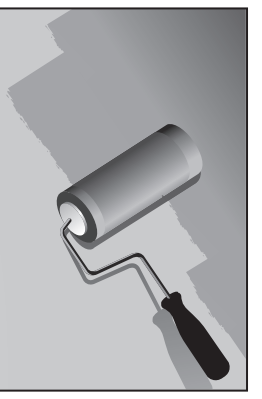



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Getting 'Window Wise' with Clear Cut Installations

SOUTH MOUNTAIN – Clear Cut Installations owner Steve Caza has himself a new position that is keeping him on top of the latest industry trends.

Recently, Caza was named as vice-president of the Cambridge-based Siding and Windows Dealers Association of Canada (SAWDAC), a national lobby group.

"This year is its 25th anniversary, and 15 years ago, we developed a program called Window Wise, a national installation program for windows and siding," he said.

Window Wise is meant to control quality assurance, and is designed to give homeowners peace of mind that their window investment will be a lasting one, according to the program's website (www.windowwise.com).

Caza said SAWDAC was also key in helping with the creation of the fenestration installation technician (FIT) program, along with the Ontario government.

"It basically covers everything to do with windows," he said. "There is an exam that can be taken [through the government], and workers can become FIT certified."



Clear Cut Installations owner Steve Caza was recently named vice-president of the Siding and Windows Dealers Association of Canada based in Cambridge, Ontario. Press Photo – Uhrig

At Clear Cut Installations, all crew leaders have the advanced certification, while Caza said the company has in the past, and continues to sponsor those employees interested in advancing their individual knowledge.

"At the end of it all, it is a matter of making sure all windows are installed properly," he said.

Meanwhile, Caza is enthused about being involved with SAWDAC, having volunteered two years ago to be director on the board, before joining its leadership.

"It is interesting work because it keeps me up to date on what's going on in our industry," he said.

Meanwhile, Caza's involvement with the Window Wise program has also allowed his firm to become adept to the needs of window installation.

"We're using more shims now, and foam in the windows so they don't bow," he said. "Basically, the key for us is to keep the water on the outside… As simple as that sounds."

In fact, Caza said his crews, at times, have found many homes with serious water infiltration issues near windows.

"It seems like such a simple solution to keep water to the outside… Anyone can slap on shingles or put windows in, but if you're not keeping water to the outside, you're not doing it right," he said.

As well, homeowners who hire companies registered with the Window Wise program receive a five-year transferrable warranty on the work.

"One in 10 jobs are randomly inspected," Caza said. "To ensure quality."

Transform your home with spring décor

This spring, infuse your home with vibrant colours, fresh floral touches and breezy fabrics. You don't have to spend a lot of money to do it – simply update pieces you already own to create a brand new look for the season.

Lighten up



Do you have velvet drapes or a sofa covered in heavy fabric? Start by removing the drapes and replace them with airy sheets. Slipcover the sofa and other furniture with paler tones. Remember that sheer curtains, bedskirts, tablecloths and pillows all say 'spring' louder than any other element. Look for designs that complement your lifestyle and interiors.

Rethink the rugs

Spring is a good time to have heavy rugs cleaned or repaired. Replace cozy area rugs with inexpensive cotton alternatives in vibrant, pastel colours.

De-clutter now

Look for organizing solutions. Any spot that is overcrowded can drain your energies and fill your life with clutter. Donate clothes, books or toys to charity. You can also have a yard sale and donate a portion of the proceeds to a non-profit organization. The Christian Children's Fund of Canada, for example, (www.ccfcanada.ca) works to improve the lives of children living in poverty around the world.

Accessorize

Spring is all about rebirth, making it a wonderful time to reboot your home décor. Bring out your floral china, fresh plants, flowering pots or plant elegant orchids in your own backyard. With the change in seasons, these lively touches can breathe new life into your home. *– News Canada*

