Home Energy & Improvement

YOUR GUIDE TO THOSE FALL HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

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Cold weather countdown

Fall is the time to prepare your home for the cold weather ahead. The following is general advice on some of the tasks you can do now to save energy and ensure your health and comfort in the coming months.

Draftproofing: Cold air can leak into your home from windows, doors, and walls and ceilings adjacent to unheated areas or the outdoors. Identify the air leaks in your home and seal them with caulking and weatherstripping. Examine existing caulking, especially the outdoor caulking that is exposed to the elements, and replace it if it shows signs of deterioration. Note that fumes from caulking can cause respiratory irritation or allergic reactions. Keep caulking tubes tightly covered when not in use and make sure your work area is well ventilated. Also provide extra ventilation during the period when the caulking material "cures" or sets; this period varies according to the type of material.

Insulation: Insulation is an important means of saving energy and reducing your heating bill: installing basement insulation, for example, can cut your costs by up to 30 percent. Exercise caution, however, if you are performing this job by yourself. Obtain detailed, step-by-step instructions to guide you through the entire process, which includes determining the amount of insulation you need and choosing appropriate materials. Also observe the following precautions:

-wear a face mask and CSA certified goggles, hard hat and steel-toed boots. Long sleeves should also be worn.

-take special care when handling heavy or bulky objects, especially when going up or down a ladder or stairs. Protect your back when lifting heavy objects; don't lift and reach at the same time.

-don't take smoking breaks near insulations or fumes.

-watch for nails protruding through the roof sheathing above your head.

-attic insulation--to prevent a fire, insure proper clearances when insulating around chimneys and recessed lighting fixtures.

-basement insulation--maintain adequate temporary lighting. Keep yourself and insulation materials away from the flue pipe of the furnace and any other sources of heat.

-wall insulation--blowing insulation into a wall may be better left to a contractor with specialty equipment. To prevent sparking, electricity in the wall cavities being filled should be turned off until the job is finished.

-make a special effort to reduce your own and your family's exposure to dust, particles from materials or irritating substances. Provide ventilation for the work area and isolate it from the rest of the house by closing doors or hanging up curtains of plastic. Keep the work area clean, vacuuming frequently. Don't wear work clothing in other areas of the house. Vacuum work clothes to remove visible fibres and wash them separately from other clothing. Provide additional ventilation to the whole house while work is in progress. If you or a family member have special health concerns, such as allergies, asthma or a chemical sensitivity, consult an allergist for guidance in selecting materials that can be tolerated.

Heating systems: Assuming that homeowners perform the routine task of checking and

Please turn to page 4



Chieftain photo by S.L. Cumberland

Tarring the roof

The Iroquois Civic Centre has been going through an extensive renovation using Federal-Provincial Infrastructure money. Crews have been busy over the past couple of weeks and are doing insulating and tarring up on the roof.

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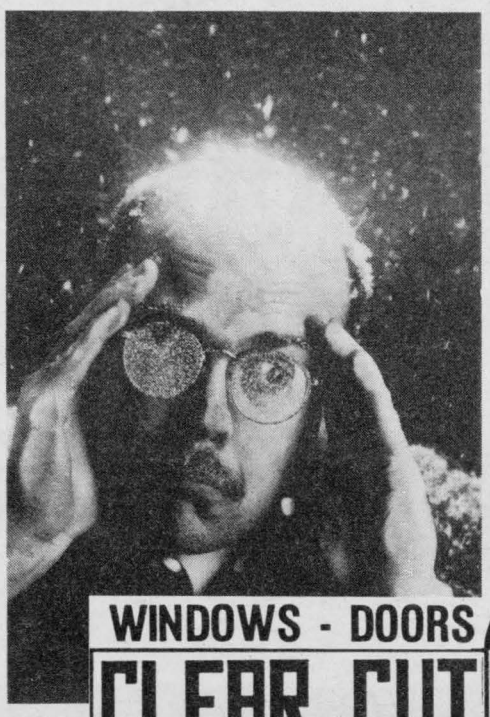

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Renovating kitchen and bathroom offer best return for homeowners

One Ontario homeowner recently added a 300 square foot, main floor family room addition to his home. The cost? $30,000. The return in terms of improved market value of this house? Just $7,000, according to a professional residential real estate appraiser.

"Big ticket" renovation projects don't always pay back dollar for dollar. In the case of the $30,000 addition, the value of the house is still determined by what the market will bear for a house of its type, in its location.

Real estate appraisers advise that home improvement projects must be chosen carefully to maintain competitiveness - not to achieve luxury status which may result in minimal payback and could even price the house out of its own market.

Members of the Ontario Association - Appraisal Institute of Canada were surveyed recently on their views of the home renovation projects that offer top dollar value on return on sale. Kitchen renovations took first place among appraisers in Ontario overall, with bathroom renovation and interior painting and decorating following closely in importance.

"A kitchen renovation to improve appearance and function improves the competitive edge of a house relative to new construction," commented a Thunder Bay appraiser.

"Kitchen renovation can be expensive, but this room is scrutinized closely by prospective buyers. It's important to keep the renovation cost in line with the prices range of the house," a Toronto real estate appraiser explained.

In rural areas, kitchen is important for a different reason. It is common to enter the house through the kitchen, said a Tillsonburg professional: "You want this room, to look spacious, and good."

The real estate appraisers said that kitchen renovations are a "must" in houses more than 20 years old and bathroom renovations in homes over 40 years in age, if homeowners want their house to be competitive with others when they put it up for sale.

Heating systems are another feature that the appraisers said it is an important factor when a house is on the market. "Frankly, not enough people ask about the mechanical systems," said one appraiser, "but buyers do not look at heating costs. Today, vendors with either oil or electric heating systems are being penalized at the time of sale."

A new, preferably mid-efficiency, gas furnace tells a prospective buyer that costs will be lower and that she or he won't have any problems with that aspect of the house for probably five years, the appraisal professional said.

Basement finishing was a renovation project that ranked in the top five of renovation projects with payback potential, but the appraisers cautioned people to do the job right, or skip it all together. "Payback can be severely curtailed if the quality just isn't there," a Toronto appraiser remarked. "Too many people try to do this themselves, and then they don't achieve any value later."

The real estate appraisers were also asked which projects they had seen were the smartest in terms of value return, and which were the most unusual. "Smart" projects tend to be aimed at upgrading and improving a home generally. A Kingston area appraiser described the renovation of a narrow row house to expand living space and make for a brighter interior. The use of greenhouse type windows allowed for plenty of natural light, the appraiser said. Other appraisers noted that master-bedroom and bathroom suites tended to improve homes while adding value.

Unusual projects ranged from the "bizarre" to the downright dangerous, according to the appraisers surveyed. The most unusual was the installation of an indoor-outdoor pool connected by a small waterway complete with underwater viewing area!

In Ottawa, one homeowner did a topsy-turvy renovation so that the kitchen, living and dining rooms were on the second floor while the bedrooms were on the ground floor. And in the Toronto area, one home owner actually damaged the house structurally with a renovation project which could not be finished. "All that money, and no value to show for it," was the appraiser's comment.

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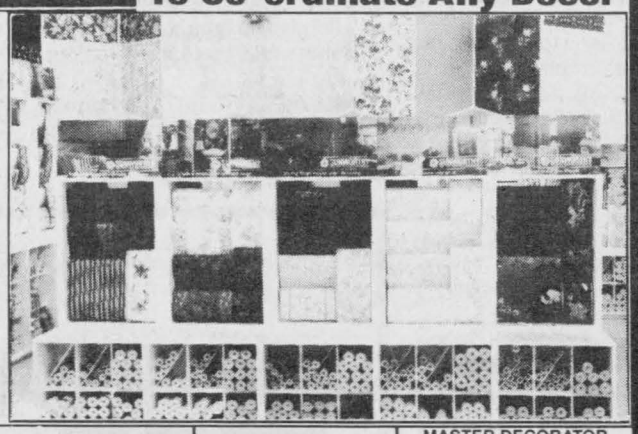

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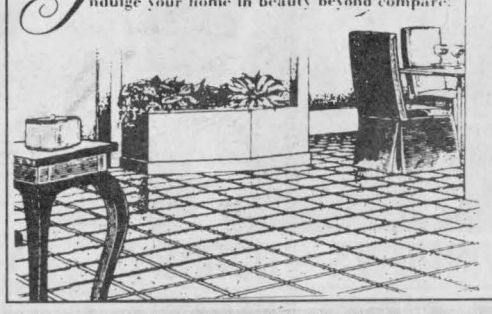

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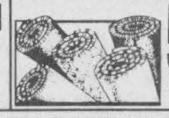

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As well as free installation and colour consultation, Margaret maintains that she has blinds to suit any home or decor. More than that, HunterDouglas products create an atmosphere for different moods.

The Silhouette line open to different settings, allowing either total privacy, bright, softened light or radiance and warmth. They are available in a full line of designer colours.

HunterDouglas combines the finest qualities of curtains, shades and blinds, says Mrs. Lee, and when closed, the soft fabrics control the RV factor entering the room. When closed, the ultraviolet light is reduced by 98 percent, and when they are open, 63 percent of ultraviolet rays are reflected away.

All products are anti static and easy to clean, which Margaret feels is a big advantage in making these window coverings practical as well as beautiful.



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Countdown

Continued from page 1

changing the filters and checking the blower operation. A gas furnace should be serviced by a gas contractor every two or three years (or as recommended by the manufacturer) to ensure efficient performance and safety.

An oil or wood furnace should be cleaned and serviced every year by a qualified contractor. If you've been renovating, if you've noticed that your house now gets dusty quickly, or if certain rooms in the house are always cold, your furnace ducts may also require professional cleaning to remove dust and debris.

Check that the areas around all types of furnaces are free of combustible materials, household chemicals such as bleach and paint, and obstructions of any kind.

Brick and stone chimneys and fireplace flues should be checked and cleaned once a year by a chimney sweep.

If you have a forced-air furnace, change the filter in the fall and replace it once a month during the heating season. Vacuum dampers and inlet and outlet grilles to remove dust and check that grilles are not covered by furniture, drapes or carpets.

If you have a heat pump system, see that the outdoor unit is free of leaves and debris and change the filter monthly to keep the indoor coil on the heat pump clean and free of dust. Dirty coils reduce efficiency and affect the life span of your system.

An improperly maintained wood stove is a fire hazard. Clean the stove pipe between the stove and chimney and replace any sections that are damaged. Check as well for broken or defective bricks. Check the condition of the door seals and replace them if necessary.

Eavestroughs: Eavestroughs that are clogged with leaves or debris can lead to a variety of leakage problems. If leaves travel down to the drains under the house during a heavy rain, for example, you could end up with a flooded basement. Filled gutters can also hasten ice-damming, a process whereby moisture is forced up under roof shingles during winter's freeze-thaw cycles. Remove all leaves and debris from eaves, gutters and downspouts.

Roofs: Make sure your roof is in good shape before snowy weather puts it to the test. Watch for broken, blistered or curling shingles, or a collection of granules washed from the shingles into the gutters. Be careful when using a ladder to clear eavestroughs or inspect a roof. Don't stand on the top rung, don't over reach and don't let the ladder come into contact with electrical wiring. To prevent children from climbing, put the ladder away when you're not using it. If you're buying a new ladder, look for the CSA mark of identification.

Humidifiers: Humidifiers add moisture to the air, relieving the desert-like dryness of many Canadian homes in winter. Try to ensure that the relative humidity in your house doesn't rise above 50 percent. Humidity above this level promotes the growth of bacteria, dust mites and fungi (including moulds) that can provoke allergic reactions in susceptible people. Moreover, if the tanks on some models of humidifiers are not cleaned properly or often enough they can become a breeding ground for harmful microorganisms that are then sprayed into your home. Consider buying a hygrometer to measure the humidity conditions in your home. Clean the unit before you use it and be sure to follow all cleaning and maintenance instructions.

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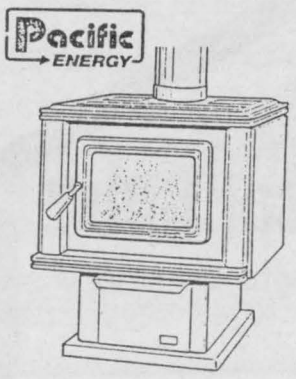

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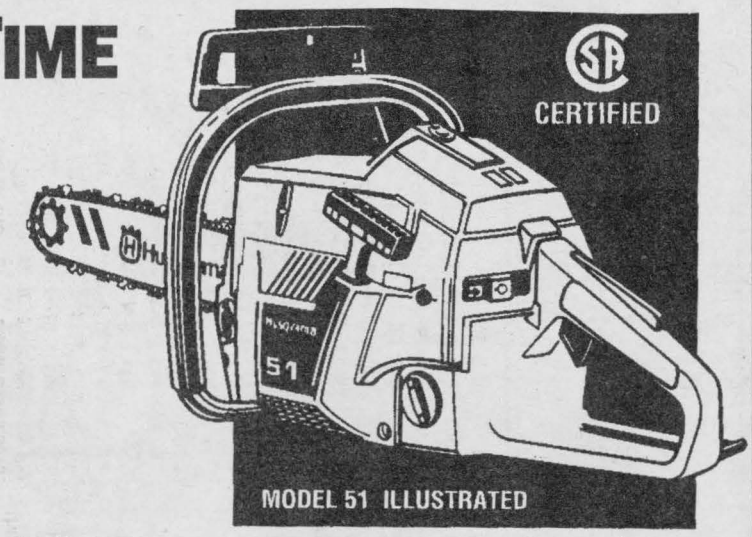

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It's important to be careful how your wood stove burns

What is burned in wood stoves, and how it burns is as important to its safe operation as its initial installation. A fire with lots of oxygen will burn cleanly with virtually no smoke or creosote build-up. Long, slow, overnightburns and smouldering fires are not recommended, as well as overdamping or smothering fires.

Although on the surface, lighting a fire seems as simple as applying a lit match to wood or paper. However, to safely operate wood stoves their are some specific firing techniques reccomended.

Use lots of newspaper, six to ten crumpled sheets. With the paper add plenty of small pieces of dry kindling, and remember, before lighting a fire, set the air controls fully open.

Once the kindling is flaming brightly, add a few pieces of larger kindling, taking care not to smother the fire. Never add just one piece of larger wood at a time, and only reload the wood stove when the room or house temperature or house temperature has begun to fall.

If you want to produce less heat, use smaller pieces, not fewer pieces.

If you want to take the chill off the house in the spring or the fall, and use the 'flash fire' technique. This reduces the heat given off while avoiding a slow smouldering fire.

Burn each new load of wood for 20 to 45 min., until the wood is flaming brightly and is well charred. This burns off many of the wood pollutants that would otherwise be released when the fresh wood is placed on a hot bed of coals.

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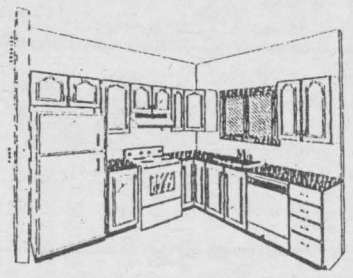

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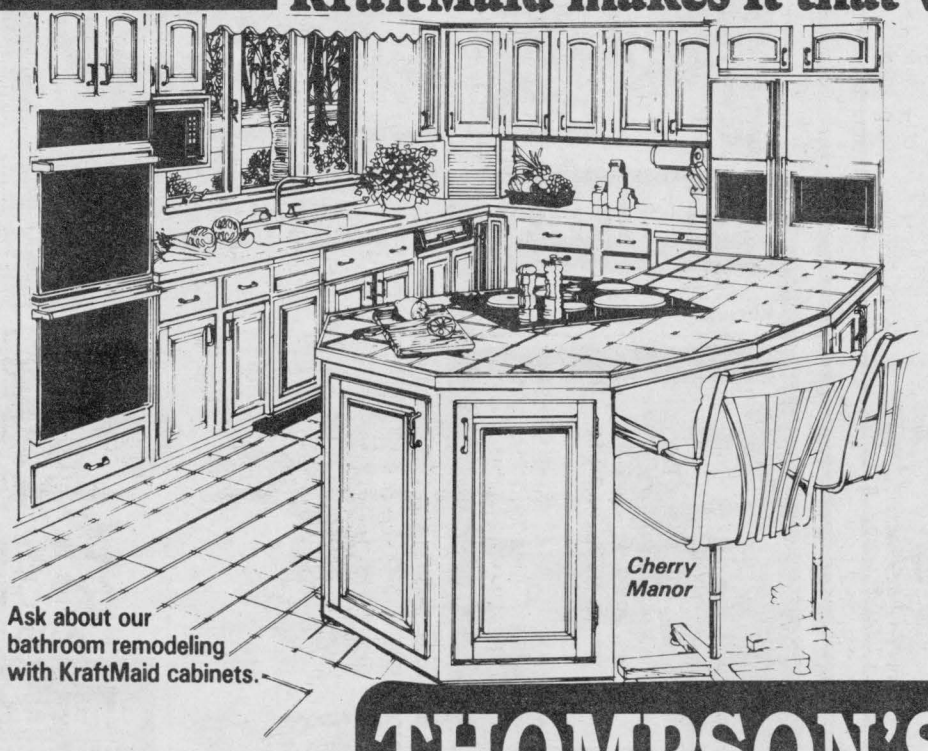

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Look into new energy efficient windows

Windows account for the greatest amount of heat loss, says CSA - almost 25 percent - in the average insulated home in Canada. Since window technology has advanced dramatically in recent years, it makes sense to look into purchasing high performance or energy-efficient windows if you're renovating your home, or building a new one. High performance windows should be considered especially for large, north-facing or exposed windows in an electrically heated home. In these situations, you may find that such windows can help you save energy, reduce your heating bill, reduce damage and maintenance costs due to condensation, and make your home more comfortable.

Energy-efficient features.

Generally, windows that can be classed as high performance incorporate one or more of the following basic features:

Low-E (emissivity) coating -an ultrathin, almost transparent film applied to window glass, a low-E coating acts as a heat barrier that keeps heat in during the winter and out during the summer. In winter, the coating reflects heat from warmed objects inside a room back into the house; in summer heat is radiated outward to reduce heat gain. As an added benefit, low-E coatings also block most of the incoming ultraviolet light that fades carpets, drapes and furniture.

Multiple glazing -with two or more layers of glass (or plastic members for inner panes). Glass in itself has no insulation value. It's the air between the panes of glass that provides insulation. In triple glazing, a second air space is added that increases a window's insulation value.

Insulating gas -replacing the air between panes with an inert (harmless) gas, usually argon or krypton, cuts down on the amount of heat loss through convection and conduction. The insulation value of a windows that is both low-E coated and gas-filled is substantially increased.

Insulating spacers -between the layers of gas. Inserting non-conductive or insulating spacers between the panes instead of aluminum spacers reduces heat loss and the potential for condensation around the edges of the panes.

The style of window and the materials used for frames and sashes also influence window performance. Fixed (non-opening) windows are the most inherently energy efficient. Other styles are awning, casement, turn and tilt, single or double hung, and horizontal slider. Wood, wood clad, vinyl, fibreglass and PVC (polyvinyl chloride) frames tend to provide the best insulation. To boost their energy performance, aluminum frames are now available that have a "thermal break" (non-conductive space) separating the inner and outer parts of the frame.

Since windows incorporate a number of elements that can be combined in different ways, The Canadian Window and Door Manufacturers Association (CWDMA) has initiated a voluntary, national certification program that can potentially make comparison and selection much easier for the homeowner. Under this program, windows certified by the CWDMA will bear both a permanent label showing a certification reference number and a temporary label. The temporary label will show the unit's overall Energy Rating (ER) according to CSA standards.

It is important to know that the highest positive ER (heat gain) available is not always your best choice and that the difference of a few rating points may not be considerations. The location of your window and the local climate are prime considerations.

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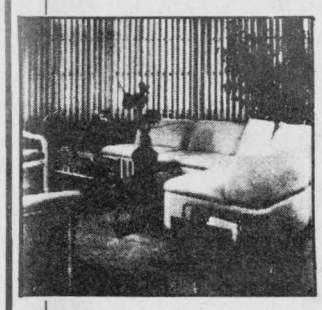
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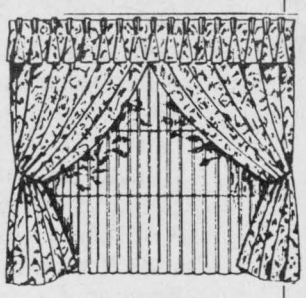
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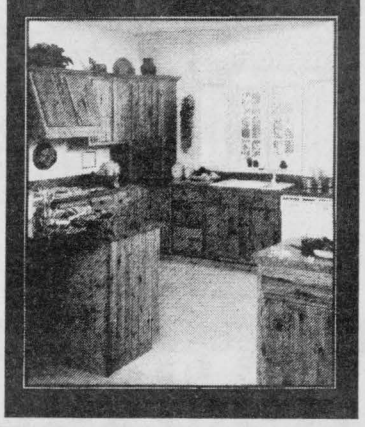
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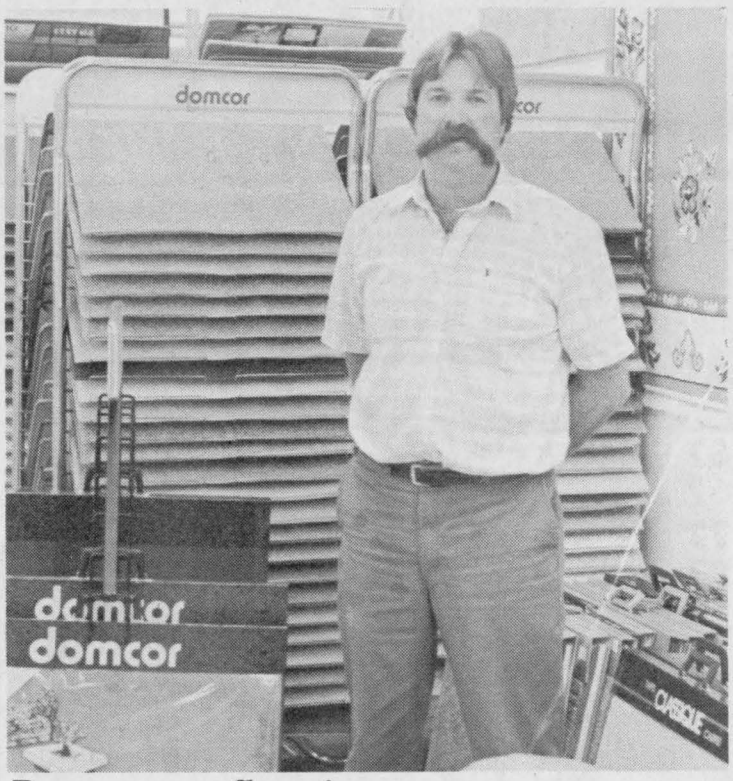
Carpets are more than something to walk on

by Michael Bailey
Chieftain Staff Reporter

You walk on them every day of your life. You might not necessarily own one yourself, but chances are, you have a friend, neighbour, or relative who does.

Carpets.

What do people want in a carpet?



Decorator flooring

Doug Byers of Fader/Byers Appliances, in the Iroquois Shopping Plaza, is a local supplier of floor coverings. Doug carries a good supply of inventory from ceramic tiles to carpet.

Chieftain photo by S.L. Cumberland

According to the owner of Morrisburg House of Carpets, Fred Harper, "It all depends on the individual?"

"I have a lot of people come in and say, I want to spend around $3000, what have you got? And I ask them what they need? The problem with people today, is that because of the recession, they're not buying what they, need, only what they can afford," said Fred.

According to Mr. Harper, when people do come in and ask for his opinion, after looking over the room they're doing, he'll give them the advice they're looking for.

"You have to trust the person you're doing business with and if you think that I'm going to sell you the most expensive carpet I have because you've asked for my opinion, then you're wrong. Business is built on trust," stated Fred.

One of the most important aspects of purchasing a new carpet, is not what you see, but rather, what you don't see.

"I stress to my customers, the importance of good underpad," said Fred. "You could put a relatively inexpensive carpet on a good underpad and it would extend the life of the carpet an extra ten years. I've got underpad here that is guaranteed for 20 years, the life of two carpets!"

Another important part of shopping for a new carpet according to Mr. Harper, is information.

"You can never be too informed. People should take some time to find out about the different textures, density, pounds per square inch and so on. I could put ten carpets down on the floor, all the same colour and each carpet would be completely different."

According to Doug Byers, owner of Fader/Byers in the mall in Iroquois, the colour of the carpet is also important.

"Traditional rooms are best suited to high quality carpet with luxurious dense pile. Today the most popular colours seem to be greens and greys," said Doug.

However, regardless of personal preferences, there are fundamental rules of colour selection.

"Colour can alter space, camouflage or highlight architectural details, or reflect style, but most of all, it creates a special mood for your room," said Doug.

Even though colour is not the only thing to think about when buying a carpet, remember, it certainly exerts the most influence on the final purchase, so be sure its a colour you can live with for the long haul.

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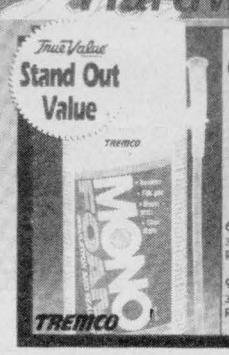

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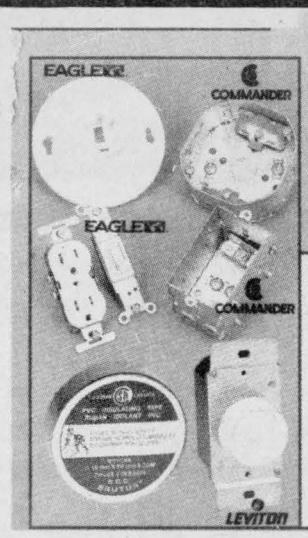

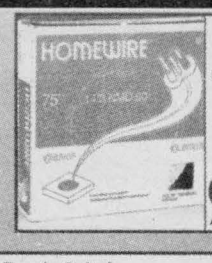

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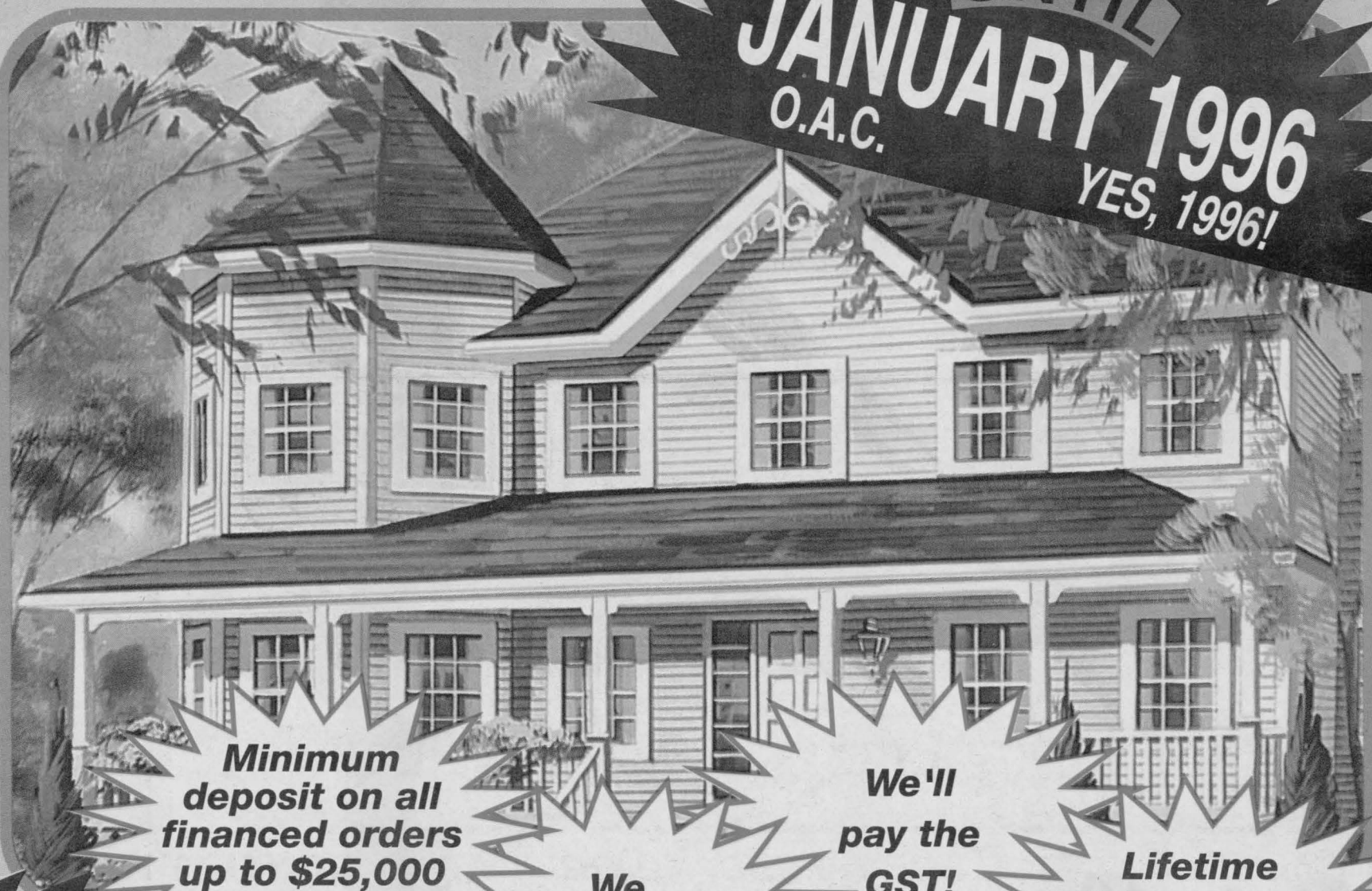

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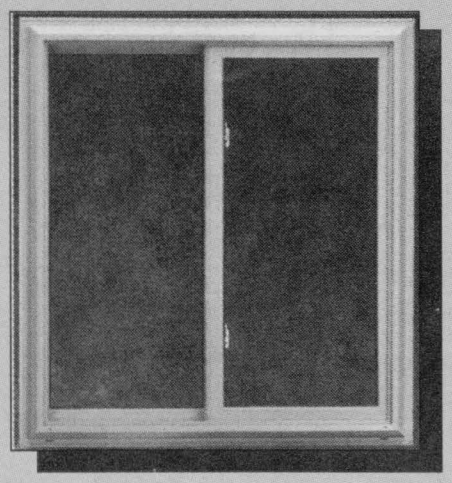

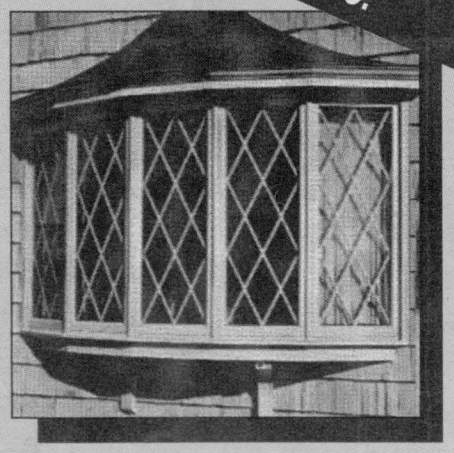

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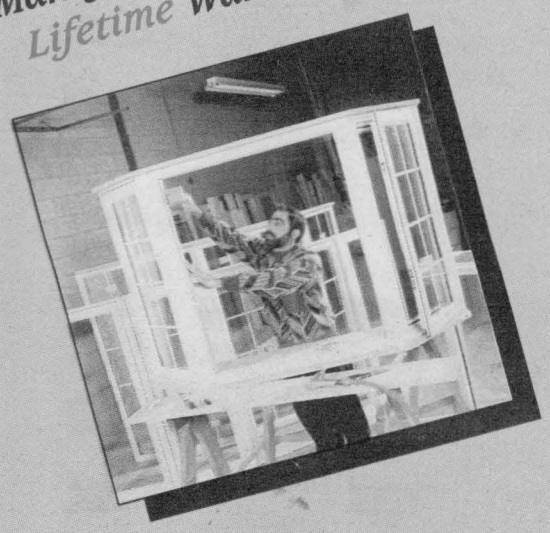

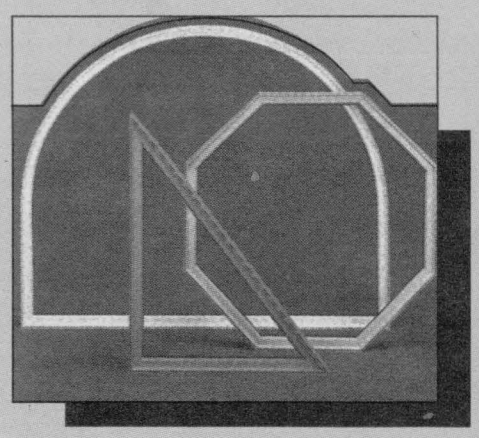

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