



**FALL 2023**

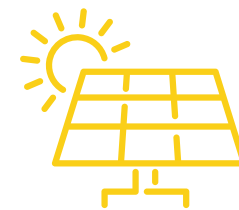
# **HOME IMPROVEMENT**

**Special Supplement to the  
Monroe County Herald**

**MONROE COUNTY  
HERALD**

**Thursday, September 28, 2023  
16 pages**





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# Sparta brothers start garage door business

By KYLE EVANS  
Staff Writer

Arvin & Dan Eby, of rural Sparta opened shop in June dealing with anything related to overhead garage doors. Dan worked for a garage door company out on the east coast for the past three years and brings the operations side to the business. His brother Arvin travelled around doing humanitarian aid for the past ten years and brings the bookkeeping side to the business.

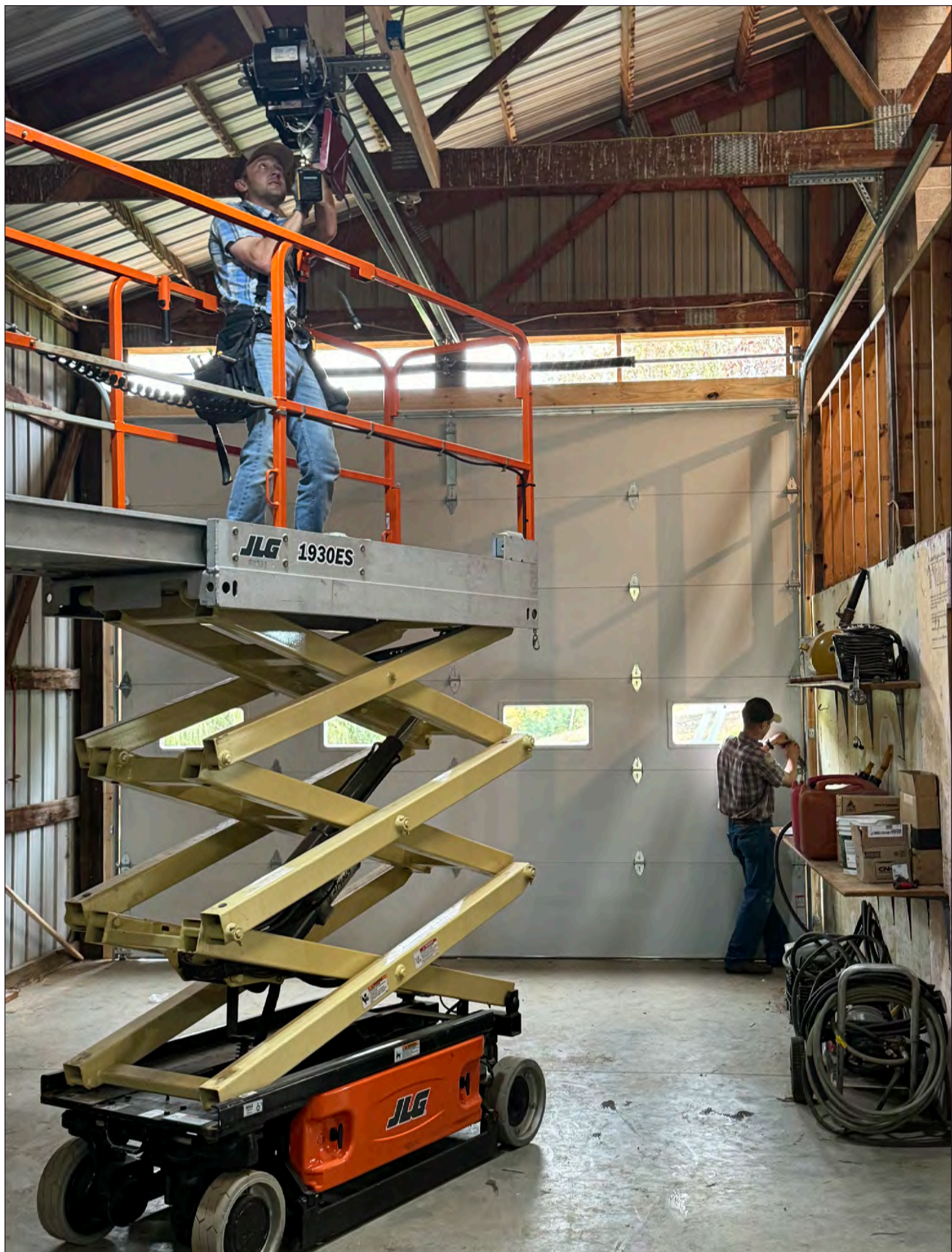
The brothers, who grew up in central Wisconsin decided it was time to come back home where their family is. Dan said, “we both love the Sparta area and always have.”

He said, “a garage door business looked like a good opportunity to serve the Sparta area, as there isn’t one based out of Sparta.”

They sell and install any size garage door and openers, residential or commercial. They get their doors from C.H.I. overhead doors, based out of Illinois and they pair them with Liftmaster openers. They also do repair of doors, spring repair, and anything else related to overhead garage doors.

They do all the work they can at their shop on Cty Hwy AA between Sparta and Norwalk, but most of the work is done on the road, at a home or business. Since starting out, most of their business has come from the Sparta and Cashton areas.

“We’re a small family-owned business and our customers deal directly with us, we answer the phone, and we install the doors,” said Dan. “You aren’t dealing with some big corporation.” Sparta Door Solutions, according to Dan, prides themselves in quality craftsmanship and good customer



All American Do it Center is mobile, coming to customers, whenever requested. Herald photo by Benny Mailman.



# City loan program to help repair homes

Low to moderate income families can receive no interest loans for home repairs

By JAYME BAHL  
Staff Writer

Common council for the city of Sparta approved a new resolution on August 16<sup>th</sup> to establish a loan program offering to help rehabilitate owner occupied homes within the city limits, the Community Home Rehabilitation Loan Program (CHRLP).

The CHRLP will provide qualified homeowners with no-interest, deferred payment home repair loans up to \$20,000.

The program will be run by a committee appointed by the mayor and overseen by the City Administrator and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Coordinator. CHRLP will meet the second Wednesday of every month in city hall and the meetings will comply with the Wisconsin Open Meetings Law. A designated program administrator will be selected, with duties including publicizing, receiving applications, verifying loan request eligibility, maintaining records at meetings, loan applications and maintaining individual loan files. They will be responsible for the disbursements of funds and maintaining proper ledgers on the city's CHRLP funds and for all individual loans.

Loans through the program will be limited to improvements making the

property habitable, safer, or sanitary. Some examples are roof, siding, furnaces, adding handicap accessibility, new water heater, or updates to existing central air conditioning. Ineligible improvements would be new appliances, unfinished spaces, or landscaping. A unit is also ineligible for a loan if the rehabilitation cost is more than 50% of the value, after the rehabilitation. Funds cannot be used to reimburse for work previously done.

All loans will be zero interest and will not exceed \$20,000. A mortgage and note will be issued with the Register of Deeds against the borrower's property in the amount of the loan, with the office fee deducted from the loan amount. Repayment will be due in full when the occupant leaves the residence. The repaid funds are returned to the CHRLP balance and used to fund other rehabilitation loans.

To be eligible to apply for a loan, there are a few requirements for the existing

home loan and occupant's income. Homes cannot have an existing loan that exceeds 100% of fair market value based on the recent tax bill. There can be no delinquent taxes nor judgements against the property. The total income of all occupants, 18 and older, cannot exceed the annual low- or moderate-income levels set by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The committee can approve or deny any applications based on their own discretions. The program has a complaint procedure where applicants can appeal by submitting a request for reconsideration and giving a reason. If the committee still denies the application, the municipal board will hear the appeal and decide. Written authorization by the city of Sparta building inspector will also be required prior to funds being distributed.

**LOAN cont. on pg. 14**



## 8 steps to a more functional kitchen

A kitchen is often the most utilized room in a house. Meals may be prepared, cooked and often eaten in kitchens, and the room is often utilized as a homework spot or a makeshift place to pay bills and stay on top of household needs. By enhancing the organization and functionality of the kitchen, homeowners can enjoy these popular spaces even more.

Homeowners have increased their spending on home improvements in recent years. According to the Joint Center for Housing Centers for Harvard University, project spending rose to \$472 billion in 2022 from \$328 billion in 2019. It's estimated consumers will have spent \$485 billion by the end of 2023. Kitchen renovations were the most popular upgrade and accounted for the highest budgets in 2021, according to Houzz. When the time comes to renovate a kitchen, homeowners can take steps to make these spaces more organized and therefore functional. Here are eight tips to creating a more functional kitchen.

**1. Increase storage,** and then invest in more. Make the most of corner cabinets and other potential dead spots in a kitchen. Various products can be used to organize awkwardly angled or shaped areas. Kitchen designers also can work with you to reconfigure cabinets and kitchen layouts.

**2. Organize utensils and dishes around the sink/dishwasher.** Rather than traversing the kitchen to put clean dishes away, make loading and unloading the dishwasher that much easier by locating commonly used items next to and above it. Similarly, place frequently used saucepans, baking dishes and other items near the oven or food preparation area.

**3. Utilize drawer and cabinet organizers.** Make a place for everything in the kitchen. Take out all items and see what you need and use all the time. Then coordinate storage around those items so everything fits perfectly. Pull-out shelves and Lazy Susans also can facilitate access.

**4. Add shelves to cabinets.** If you can afford to have a custom-built kitchen, by all means design cabinets according to preference. If

you're using standard cabinets, you may have to reconfigure shelves and spacing to fit the items you have. This also will help you maximize cabinet space.

**5. Organize the garbage.** Have a pull-out drawer or cabinet to store trash bins. Separate compost, trash and recycling needs.

**6. Create continuity in the room.** Many open concept homes will have kitchens open up to another room in the home. Mirror the design scheme from elsewhere in the house, and make sure that the flow between spaces is not obstructed.

**7. Create a beverage station.** A beverage station can minimize the time needed to make a cup of tea or coffee or for the kids to grab juice or chocolate milk.

**8. Have a workspace in the kitchen.** Whether paying bills, making a grocery list or leaving notes for the family, a dedicated workspace can add more function to the room. Be sure there is task lighting nearby and ample overhead lighting to ensure that all kitchen needs are illuminated properly.



**All American Do it Center is mobile, coming to customers, whenever requested.**  
Herald photo by Benny Mailman.

## ‘REMODELING’

continued from page 2

service. Dan said, “that’s what separates us from the competition.”

“It really helps that this area has many local business to support the needs of a new business,” said Dan.

To get in contact with Sparta Door Solutions visit their website at [spartadoorsolutions.com](http://spartadoorsolutions.com). The website features many different types and styles of garage doors.

### Garage doors boast the best ROI

Remodeling with a return on investment in mind can be a smart strategy for homeowners, whether one is thinking about moving in the next few months or further down the road. Though this approach is an inexact science, in many instances, it’s savvy for homeowners to consider what buyers may want when planning home improvements.

Homeowners may be surprised to learn which renovations garner the best return of investment (ROI) at resale. The home loan and refinancing company RenoFi indicates that overall home improvement projects provide a 70 percent ROI on average. Many high-ROI projects add functional space and improvement. The following are some exterior renovations that help homeowners recoup the most money at resale, according to Remodeling magazine’s “2022 Cost vs. Value Report.”

1. Garage Door Replacement: 93.3 percent recouped of \$4,041 cost
2. Manufactured Stone Veneer: 91.4 percent recouped of \$11,066 cost

3. Siding replacement (Fiber Cement): 68.3 percent recouped of \$22,093 cost

4. Window replacement (Vinyl): 67.5 percent recouped of \$20,482 cost

5. Siding replacement (Vinyl): 67.2 percent recouped of \$18,662 cost

6. Window replacement (Wood): 66.3 percent recouped of \$24,388 cost

7. Deck addition (Wood): 64.8 percent recouped of \$19,248 cost

8. Entry Door Replacement (Steel): 63.8 percent recouped of \$2,206 cost

The majority of renovations on Remodeling magazine’s list of the best investments are exterior renovations, making this area of a home a particular point of interest for homeowners. The only interior project that cracked the Top 10 ROI for projects was a minor midrange kitchen remodel.

Exterior renovations perhaps add the most bang for your buck because they’re not only functional, but also because they add immediate curb appeal. Much in the way it has been said people eat with their eyes first — which is why chefs spend so much time on elaborate plating — buyers will judge a property by how it looks when they arrive, even before they’ve stepped inside a home. In essence, home buyers often judge a book by its cover. A worn exterior may indicate to potential buyers that the home was not maintained, however false that assumption may be.

It’s important for homeowners to consider all factors before beginning a renovation. Certain projects offer a stronger return on investment than others, and that’s a significant consideration for homeowners thinking of selling their homes.

# How to create a welcoming entertaining space at home

The lasting effects of the pandemic that swept across the globe in 2020 will be studied for years to come. Though some consequences have yet to be discovered, others, including a heightened desire to entertain loved ones at home, were already apparent even before the world emerged from the darkest days of the pandemic.

A 2021 study from ButcherBox™ found that 46 percent of survey respondents were excited to host and entertain guests in their home when it was deemed safe to do so. Such gatherings were given the green light years ago, and homeowners have maintained their enthusiasm for entertaining. With that in mind, homeowners looking to upgrade their entertaining spaces can look to these tips as they prepare to welcome guests into their homes.

- Establish various seating areas. Ample seating is a must when welcoming guests into your home. Open layouts make it easier to add seating without feeling cramped, so homeowners whose properties feature such design schemes may find it easier to accommodate more guests than homes with more traditional, compartmentalized

layouts. When arranging seating, aim to create multiple seating areas so guests can speak privately to one another if they so desire. Multiple seating areas also ensure more than one conversation can take place at a time. That’s especially useful when hosting a game watch, as some guests may come for the game while others may be more interested in socializing than the score.

- Designate spaces for children. Kids are typically part of the equation when entertaining at home, so it’s important that hosts create spaces for them as well. A basement or children’s playroom can do the trick. If the weather outside is welcoming, a fenced-in backyard with games and a trampoline can provide the perfect space for kids to have fun while the adults get to engage in conversation and catch up with friends and family apart from boisterous youngsters.

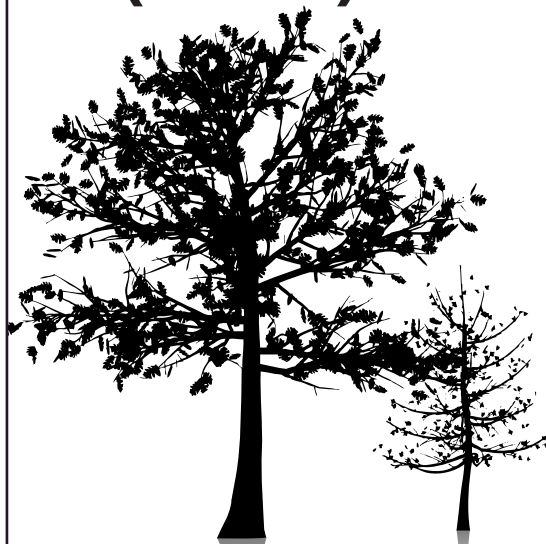
- Add lighting. Dimly lit rooms may be a homeowner’s desired aesthetic when no one’s visiting, but lack of light can give the impression certain rooms are off limits

**HOME cont. on pg. 12**

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# 3 modern kitchen features to consider

It's well documented that kitchens are the most popular rooms in many homes. Kitchens are where families tend to congregate during holiday celebrations, and many a child has tackled their homework as mom or dad prepares dinner just a few steps away.

With so much time spent in the kitchen, it's no wonder kitchen renovations are popular. In fact, data from the National Association of Home Builders indicates kitchens are the most popular room to remodel. Whether homeowners are planning a full scale remodel or a few tweaks to update the room, the following are three popular features of modern kitchens.

## 1. Kitchen island

A recent survey from the interior design experts at Houzz found that kitchen islands are popular for a variety of reasons. Fifty-eight percent of respondents indicated they enjoy eating at kitchen islands, while 49 percent reported they like islands for entertaining. Forty-five percent of respondents like socializing around kitchen islands. Islands provide a versatile functionality that comes in handy when preparing meals on typical weeknights and when hosting friends and family on special occasions like the holidays and birthdays. Islands come in a variety of shapes and sizes and can be customized to fit just about any space. Mobile islands can be utilized in small kitchens when homeowners want the extra prep space but think the kitchen would be too cramped if a permanent island were added.

## 2. Deep sink

The popularity of farmhouse style sinks is proof that large and deep sinks are sought-after among today's homeowners. Farmhouse sinks may be best suited to a particular aesthetic, but a 2021 study from the National Association of Home Builders found that side-by-side double sinks and walk-in pantries were the most popular of 30 listed kitchen features. That study surveyed more than 3,200 recent and prospective home buyers. Deep sinks are especially useful for people who love to cook, making them a solid addition to any kitchen where home chefs ply their trade most nights of the week.

## 3. Storage

As the NAHB study indicated, kitchen storage space is sought after among modern homeowners. As home cooks expand their culinary horizons and cook more elaborate meals, they need extra places to store specialty pots and pans, ingredients and other materials. Homeowners looking to add more storage in the kitchen can consult with a local contractor about how to create such space. A walk-in pantry can do the trick, but homeowners with kitchens where space is more limited may need to get a little more creative. Sliding-door pantries and roll-out shelving in existing cabinets can add functional space in kitchens with close quarters.

Modern kitchens are visual marvels and highly functional spaces. A new island, a deep sink and some extra storage space can help homeowners transform their existing kitchens into spaces that cater to their every need.

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# Expert tips for creating a workshop space in your garage

Have you always dreamt of building a workshop dedicated to your practical or creative projects? If you have an unused area in your garage, turn it into a DIY space.

## Make a plan

Create a plan that includes the dimensions of each item you own or plan to build to give you an idea of how to organize the space. Maximize your storage space by incorporating cabinets under the workbench or adding shelves and hooks. Draw up some plans to explore different layout options.

## Focus on practicality

Make the most of your workspace by installing lockable castors under your worktable. This will allow you to move it to the middle of the garage when your vehicle isn't parked inside and reposition it near the wall when your project is finished.

## Think about comfort

Personalize your space by adding a radio or Bluetooth speaker to listen to some tunes while you work. Want to tinker in every season? Add insulation and contact an expert to install a heating or cooling system.

## Don't overlook safety

Power tools pose a hazard, especially to young children. Make sure they're stored in a locked cabinet or placed high enough to limit access.



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# 3 reasons to hire a kitchen designer

Is your kitchen in dire need of a makeover? Do you have to start from scratch? Can you keep a few elements from your current setup? Do you even know where to start? Either way, a kitchen designer can help. Here are three ways this specialist can ensure your project is a success from start to finish.

## 1. You get advice tailored to your unique needs

When it comes to choosing materials, colors and furnishings, a kitchen designer can provide guidance based on your needs and preferences. Their primary goal is for you to be fully satisfied in your new kitchen.

## 2. You get access to a wide network of industry contacts

Designers often work with a wide range of suppliers and experts. They can save you a lot of legwork



researching and tracking down the businesses you need to handle the various stages of your project.

## 3. You get a highly functional kitchen

Kitchen designers remodel your kitchen to optimize efficiency. They know how to create distinct zones

for various functions, such as storing food and equipment, preparing food and cooking. Their goal is to create a space that matches your preferences and lifestyle.

Hire a local designer to help you get the kitchen of your dreams.

## Maintenance for tiled floors

Tile floors are both practical and attractive. However, they can quickly lose their appeal when dirt becomes embedded in the grout. Follow these five tips to keep your tile flooring looking its best.

**1. Clean it periodically.** Sweep regularly to control dust. Then, mop the floor to remove dirt that resists sweeping or vacuuming.

**2. Remove stains immediately.** Mold and grease stains become more difficult to remove the longer they sit. Therefore, clean any spots as soon as you notice them. Use natural products like white vinegar, black soap or soda crystals.

**3. Use gentle cleaners exclusively.** When it comes to keeping your tiled floor in top condition, oily cleaners, strippers and detergents can do more harm than good. You should also avoid using abrasive substances.

**4. Apply waterproofing.** Waterproofing treatment can protect



your tiling against water, oil and grease. It'll also help your floors retain their original beauty for longer. To waterproof your tiles, use a tile-friendly product like linseed oil.

**5. Pay attention to the grout.** Remove dirt from the grout lines where the tiles connect to one another using a toothbrush dipped

in a baking soda, lemon juice or toothpaste mixture. You can try a stronger product but take care not to damage the grout.

Do you have dirty tile floors? Look for a professional cleaner in your area that specializes in tiled floors.



## What do you know about stretch ceilings?

Do you want to install a false ceiling in your home? Are you looking for an alternative to a suspended ceiling? If you've never heard of a stretch ceiling before, here's what you need to know.

### What is it?

A stretch ceiling consists of lightweight material, like PVC, held in place by tension. This membrane is flexible and can be stretched when exposed to heat. The material comes in many sizes and colours. It can also be personalized with pattern prints.

### What are the advantages?

Because it's so versatile, a stretch ceiling works with any type of decor. It can be installed on sloped, vaulted, curved or irregularly shaped ceilings. This lightweight solution is made-to-order and can easily be removed when the time comes to replace it. It's long-lasting and recyclable, making it environmentally friendly.

### How do you install it?

For the best results, you need at least two professionals to install a stretch ceiling. The product warranty could be voided if you attempt the installation yourself. The material is attached to fasteners and then stretched while heat is applied. The installation time depends on the size of your ceiling but can typically be done within a single day.

Contact a local professional for a quote on installing a stretch ceiling in your home.



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## 6 decorating themes for an elegant bedroom



Do you want to change the decor of your bedroom to give it a more elegant atmosphere? Here are six themes to inspire you.

- 1. Romantic.** Combine shades of white and pale pink to add softness to the room. Install mouldings along the walls to create a sense of grandeur. Complete the space with a faux fur rug and a four-poster bed.
- 2. Adventurer.** Play around with earth tones and decorate the room with elements that evoke images of worldwide travel. Want to make an impression? Display a large map of the ancient world on the wall.
- 3. Bohemian.** Install long, sheer curtains on the windows or hang them directly from the ceiling with soft backlighting. Add a pop of color to the room by filling the bed with cozy cushions.

**4. Urban.** Create a brick accent wall – real or faux – and adorn it with metallic accessories. Choose dark tones like black and grey for an extra touch of chic.

**5. Scandinavian.** Combine elements like natural wood, rope and wool. Keep things simple in white and black to create a clean, warm atmosphere. Focus on a few decorative, functional objects.

**6. Zen.** Paint the walls a soft color and fill the space with plants, simple furniture and varied light sources. Your serene space will surely be conducive to relaxation.

Are you short on creativity or confidence? Team up with an interior designer to help you create the space of your dreams.

## 'HOME'

continued from page 5

or lead to muted conversations. Adjust recessed lighting so bulbs provide a warm but well-lit space for guests to relax and converse. In rooms without such lighting, open blinds or curtains or add some floor lamps before the party so rooms are well lit when guests arrive. Avoid lighting candles during the gathering, as flickering flames pose a fire hazard.

• Utilize Florida rooms or outdoor spaces when possible. Afford access to a Florida room or a deck or patio if the weather allows. The great outdoors tends to be a natural mood enhancer, and even some brief breaks in the fresh air can do guests some good. If guests will be spending ample time in a Florida room or outdoors, ensure ample seating is available and make sure those spaces are well lit as well.

Entertaining at home is wildly popular, and homeowners can employ some simple



# How to prepare a fireplace for the winter

As hours of daylight shorten and fall gives way to winter, thoughts shift from fall foliage to spending time cuddling under warm blankets and being cozy indoors. A fireplace can improve the ambiance of any room and help to create a warm and welcoming gathering spot.

Home fireplaces typically are wood-burning or gas. Though maintenance for these fireplaces differs, certain preparatory steps must be taken to prepare a fireplace for winter.

## Clear the clutter

Items can accumulate in areas that are not in use, and a fireplace is no exception. Take a few hours to remove any belongings from in front of the fireplace and clean the mantle thoroughly.

## Have the chimney cleaned

Hire a professional chimney cleaning company to inspect the chimney and clean it thoroughly before winter. According to



BobVila.com, a chimney should be cleaned once a year, or after about every 80 fires. The National Fire Protection Association says failure to properly clean chimneys is one of the leading contributors to home fires. That's due to creosote, a highly flammable residue that

builds up in the flue that lines the chimney.

## Inspect the interior

The interior of a wood-burning fireplace is likely lined with fire bricks. Check for cracks and loose joints. Hire a professional mason

to make any repairs, as special materials are needed to withstand the heat of fires.

## Install a chimney cap and screen

According to Family Handyman, a chimney cap is a protective covering that goes over the top of the chimney. It is made of steel or copper mesh with a cap on top. This protects the chimney from rain and downdrafts and keeps animals and debris from getting into the chimney.

## Prune overhanging branches

If there are trees close to the home and the chimney, cut them back, as they can be a fire hazard. Branches and leaves also can restrict the proper draft of the chimney.

## Assess the outdoor vent

Gas fireplaces typically emit exhaust through a vent in the home. Remove any blockages

from the vent, including leaves, cobwebs and debris.

## Check glass or other coverings

The glass or face of the fireplace helps regulate carbon monoxide exposure and protects people from the flames. Be sure the glass covering is intact.

## Clean ceramic logs

Gas fireplaces use ceramic logs, rocks or beads that can become dusty. Clean them prior to use. Dirty ceramic logs can be a fire hazard and produce an unpleasant burning smell.

## Check the blower and pilot

If the fireplace has an electric blower, clean and dust it so it doesn't become clogged. Inspect the pilot light for any wear and tear that includes wiring or structural issues.

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## 'LOAN'

continued from page 4

The program administrator will help applicants apply and provide them with all information necessary. Completed submissions will include at minimum: a completed application, copy of most recent property tax bill, two bids by licensed/certified contractors for the work, a copy of the previous tax return and most recent pay stub of every household member over 18, and a copy of the property's homeowner's insurance. All information will be verified by the project administrator and will be kept confidential. More information may be needed if deemed necessary by the project administrator. The committee will communicate their decision in writing to the applicant, and if approved, the project administrator will continue helping the approved applicants.

The project manager will next require a completed draw request form. Projects totaling \$5,000 or less are limited to one draw at the completion of the project. Once the draw request is submitted the building inspector will be notified of the request. The inspector will view the property and approve. Then funds will be issued, to the contractor or to the homeowner. The disbursement will be accompanied by a lien waiver to be signed by the contractor. There can be only two draws on any project and records will be on each property owner's file. Emergency loans can be requested up the amount of \$10,000 and will be at the discretion of the city administrator and CDBG coordinator. Conditions of eligibility and administrative procedures would still be required.

Contracts can be terminated. Contractors can request to be removed from a contract if no funds have been disbursed and the request is made 30 days prior to their notice to proceed. City can terminate contracts based on work performance, causing additional damage to property, or irreconcilable differences between the homeowner and contractor. If work performance is an issue, there will be a meeting with the property owner, contractor and building inspector to negotiate the problem. Then, contractors will be given a reasonable amount of time to fix the problem before termination.

The cost to repair any poor craftsmanship will be deducted from all amounts owed to the contractor. The homeowner is responsible for filing an insurance claim against the contractor.



# 5 ideas for a functional, attractive kitchen island



Do you need an additional work surface or more storage space in your kitchen? Installing an island is a great solution. On top of simplifying food prep, it can also serve as a gathering place for family and friends. Here are five ways to make your island functional and beautiful.

**1. Consider built-ins**

Depending on how you use your kitchen, you can add a built-in herb station, compost bin, microwave oven, sink, hotplate or even a small pantry.

**2. Add shelves**

Place your favourite cookbooks on the shelves so they're always within reach. You could also use the shelf space to display a few practical and decorative items.

**3. Don't forget trim**

Depending on your style, wood or metal trim, for example, can give your kitchen a warm, rustic, chic or industrial look.

**4. Play with contrast**

In addition to matching your island to the rest of your kitchen, consider adding a contrasting element, whether it's a countertop in a different material or cabinets painted in a contrasting color.

**5. Include electrical outlets**

Outlets are handy for using small appliances during food prep or for charging electronic devices.

If you can't find an existing island with all the features you like, contact a professional to create a custom design.

## Is your kitchen dated, dingy, and cluttered?



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