

The background of the entire advertisement is a photograph of a well-appointed outdoor patio. In the center is a large, multi-tiered stone fireplace with a dark wood mantel. A large flat-screen TV is mounted on the wall above the fireplace. To the left, there's a wicker sofa with blue and orange cushions. In front of the sofa is a round, light-colored wooden coffee table. To the right of the fireplace, there's a wicker armchair with a striped cushion and a bright orange ceramic stool with a textured pattern. The patio is paved with grey stone tiles, and the background shows lush green trees and a wooden fence.

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With all the restrictions we've had over the past months, we've spent more time at home than ever. Personally, my thoughts have ranged anywhere from having a new home built to finishing the basement in my current home. From adding a deck to a total new look in landscaping. And there's the master bath with the jetted tub and me envisioning having it torn out and replacing it with a slipper tub. Let's not forget the home office. I know I'm not alone.

Since I am the Executive Officer of the Lehigh Valley Builders Association (LVBA), I have an obvious advantage in knowing about building codes, registrations, and what projects actually add value to my home—and how to choose a contractor I can work with. These are the very reasons why the LVBA has brought over 40 years of home shows to you. The idea is to bring you together with local companies who have the answers to your questions. Instead of having to travel around checking out different companies, the home show has put them all together for you—under one roof.

Many of you have visited our home show at Lehigh University's Stabler Arena complex over the past 21 years—until 2020 when the country shut down. As much as I have tired hearing “virtual” anything, our association teamed up with The Morning Call to produce a virtual show for 2021. In the process I found opportunities that can't be duplicated in an in-person show. A good example is our ability to have a variety of top speaker on-demand that you can access 24/7. You don't want to miss the DIY seminars with Home Improvement Coach and TV Host, Ron Hazelton.

Producers, LVBA and The Morning Call teamed up and got it done professionally. I believe you will like the results. On behalf of all of us, we look forward to you dropping by. Remember, the Expo is available 24/7 right there at your fingertips.

(By the way, we will be back at Stabler in March 2022 but with special features from this year's virtual show.)

Chuck Hamilton, Executive Officer  
Lehigh Valley Builders Association



Chuck Hamilton, Executive Officer

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## A MasterPLAN for your ideal outdoor living space

When it's time to turn your backyard dreams into reality, the hardest part can be visualizing the end result.

That's why MasterPLAN Outdoor Living takes a design-first approach. We recently sat down with founder Joshua Gillow, who has tips for anyone who wants to transform their outdoor space.

**Q: What's the biggest challenge homeowners face when planning their dream back yard?**

A: They have a hard time visualizing what it could look like. They want a pool, a patio, protection from the sun ... they know *what* they want, but don't know how to put it all together. We alleviate those stressors by managing the entire project.

**Q: What should a homeowner look for when hiring someone for a backyard project?**

A: They should look at the company's references and web site; verify the company's style and experience align with the project. Asking a contractor to design something out of their realm is a risk. You want to hire someone who is focused on a *design* first. Don't focus on square footage, focus on how the space will perform. What will the furniture look like? What will fit? Think about the entire project ... grilling, dining, and lounging areas.

**Q: What's the first mistake homeowners make with their project?**

A: More often than not, they're excited and just trust the contractor, and then find out the contractor has never done something like it before. The contractor is figuring it out as they go along. We've had to tear down entire builds because of major problems. The trouble is, homeowners are hiring *builders* and asking them to *design*. We're *designers* who *build*. We look at all the variables. For instance, steps: Can Grandma make them? What about children? We want to make sure you've considered everything.

**Q: How about long-term maintenance?**

A: The type of project materials determine the level of maintenance. In general, you pay more up front to save time later. Unlike many contractors, we are not beholden to any manufacturer when it comes to purchasing materials. Some people hire a contractor, and then four years later their deck is peeling. It's not that the contractor was trying to bamboozle anyone, but they were locked into a loyalty program and got discounts for using a certain brand. MasterPLAN suggests materials based on our experience with them.

**Q: What should a homeowner ask themselves before starting a project?**

A: 1) What am I trying to achieve? Is it just a place to get out of the house? Or do I want to add value to my home and life experience? What should it look like to be a success? They don't need *all* the details, but should have the basics. Do I want rain protection? The sound of water? A fire feature? How many seasons will I use the space?

2) Are you looking for a Band-Aid to fix something, or are you looking to create an extension of your living space? Should it be simple, or wow your friends? How can you maximize your investment?

3) What is your budget? Come up with a range. Which pieces do you see adding value, and which can you live without? If you're setting the wrong expectations now, there will be heartache later.

To learn more about MasterPLAN Outdoor Living, call 610-628-2480 or visit [mymasterplan.com](http://mymasterplan.com).





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## Surviving a home renovation

Homeowners invest large sums into improving their homes to make them more comfortable living spaces or to increase their odds of selling quickly. The Remodeling Futures Program at the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University predicted U.S. spending on home renovations and repairs to peak at \$327 billion in 2017.

Whether one is doing a large renovation or a small remodel, life may be turned upside down during the project. Furniture may be moved out of the room, walls may be demolished, water or electricity may be turned off, and appliances may be missing or not hooked up. Home improvements often drum up dust and disarray. Such projects can try the patience of any homeowner, and things may get worse before they get better.

Even though remodeling can be taxing, the end result is often worth it. Here's how to look forward to the silver lining and come out unscathed:

Discuss the project  
before it starts.

Do one project  
at a time.

Have everything  
in place ...

... but  
expect delays.

Plan an  
escape zone.







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Contest rules apply. See lehighvalleyhomeexpo.com for details.





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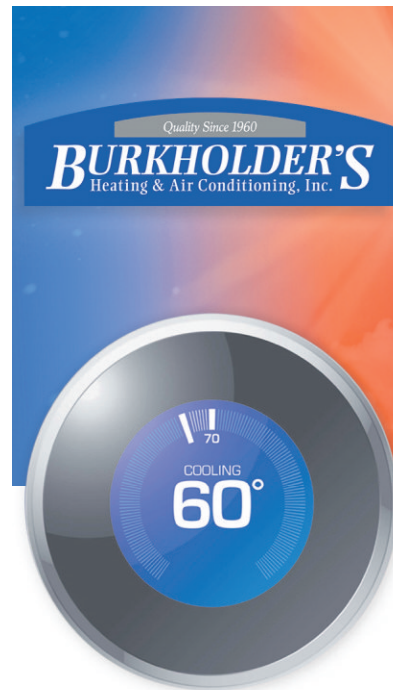
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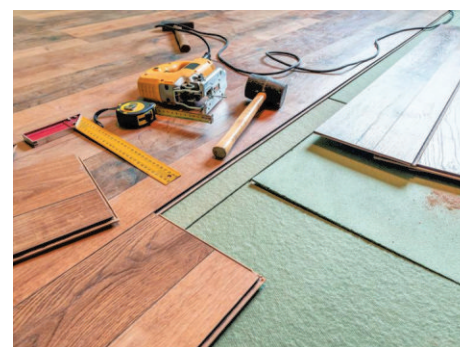
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# What to know about outdoor living spaces



Home trends come and go. What was popular as recently as a decade ago may have lost some luster in the eyes of today's home buyers. Though that's historically been the case in regard to real estate, outdoor living rooms are one relatively recent home trend that figures to have a longer shelf life, especially in the aftermath of a global pandemic during which people were encouraged to stay home as much as possible.

Real estate professionals and organizations like the National Association of Home Builders note the popularity of outdoor living spaces among prospective home buyers, and how that popularity has grown in recent years. Outdoor living rooms not only appeal to potential buyers, they also serve as a means for current homeowners to get more out of their properties. Homeowners mulling outdoor living space projects should consider various factors before deciding to go ahead with a project.

- **Cost:** The home renovation resource HomeAdvisor estimates that the average cost of an outdoor living space is around \$7,600. That cost can easily go up depending on where homeowners live and the features they want to have in their outdoor living spaces. For example, including a built-in fire pit in an outdoor living space will cost more than purchasing a stand-alone fire pit that can be picked up and moved. But many homeowners feel a built-in fire pit makes an outdoor living space even more special.

- **Return on investment:** Return on investment is another factor for homeowners to consider as they try to decide if they should install outdoor living spaces and how to design those areas. Much conflicting data about the ROI on outdoor kitchens can be found online, but many trusted real estate organizations report that such additions do not mesmerize prospective buyers. Data from the American Institute of Architects indicates that outdoor kitchens are routinely ranked among the least desirable home features,

which means homeowners should not expect substantial ROI when selling their homes. But that built-in fire pit? Estimates from the National Association of Realtors suggest fire features recover around 67 percent of homeowners' initial investment. In addition, 83 percent of homeowners surveyed by the NAR who had installed fire features said they had a greater desire to be home after completing the project.

- **Space:** An outdoor living space may only be as relaxing as the space allows. The proximity of neighbors may affect privacy levels, which can make it hard to enjoy movie night outdoors or curl up to quietly read a good book. In addition, landscaping also may need to be addressed if drainage is an issue in the backyard. That can add to the cost, and drainage concerns may limit the materials homeowners can work with. Outdoor living spaces are popular. Homeowners must consider various factors before deciding if such spaces are for them.



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# How home design trends are evolving for social distancing

COVID-19 has brought changes to everything, and home design is no exception. Experts are expecting to see lasting impacts on everything from the materials we use to the rooms we prioritize. Check out these and other noteworthy trends:

**HOUSES OVER APARTMENTS:** Many people who live in condos or apartments do so to be closer to the action — work, entertainment and shops — and never planned on spending much time at home. But the pandemic has changed that, and more people are going to want a home that offers plenty of room and outdoor space in case they need to self-isolate again.

**SELF-SUFFICIENCY:** A hard lesson we've learned is that things and services we thought we could count on aren't necessarily a sure thing, so items that increase self-reliance will become very popular. Expect to see more homes with sources of energy like solar panels, sources of heat like fireplaces and stoves, and even urban and indoor gardens that allow you to grow your own produce.

**Outdoor living:** Between playgrounds closing and parks becoming overcrowded, many of us are turning to our balconies, patios and backyards for fresh air and nature. This means we're going to be investing more in our outdoor spaces, with functional kitchens, soothing water features, cozy firepits, and high-quality outdoor furniture to create a much-needed escape.

**HEALTHIER SPACES:** Thanks to spending more time indoors and reprioritizing our health, we'll turn to design to help ensure our homes are safe and healthy for our families. We'll see a rise in products like water filtration systems as well as materials that improve indoor air quality. For new homes and



additions, alternatives to wood-framing like insulated concrete forms from Nudura, which offer improved ventilation for healthier indoor air quality and an environment that's less susceptible to mold, will be key. Home office space: Business experts are suggesting many companies will see that working from home is not only possible but offers tangible benefits, like saving money on office space rent. With working from home on the rise, creating a home office space that inspires productivity will be a major project many of us tackle. Luxury home office furniture that feels chic and blends into your décor as well as ergonomic chairs and desks will see a major boost.

**CUSTOM AND QUALITY:** With the hit to the economy, people are going to be buying less, but what they do buy will be better quality, while at the same time making an effort to support American businesses. When it comes to design, trends will shift to locally made furniture, custom-built homes and pieces and materials that stand the test of time.



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DETAILS**

**\*Internet download speeds may vary and are not guaranteed.** Observed speeds may vary based on device, connection, and other factors outside of RCN's control. Certain equipment may be required to receive Gigabit speeds—with speeds up to 940 Mbps. **Monthly modem rental fee** and/or wireless gateway may be additional. All speeds not available in all areas. **Offer valid only for new residential RCN customers** or customers with accounts in good standing who have not had RCN service within the last 60 days. **Offer expires June 15, 2021.** RCN's promotional offer extends defined, set pricing for the period of 12 months after installation. Distinct pricing exists for months 1-12. Any additional services, such as equipment, premium channels and other tiers of service are subject to an additional charge and regular increases. Additional fees apply for taxes, surcharges, equipment, activation and installation that are not included as part of the package and are subject to increases. **No contract is required** to take advantage of the promotional pricing and savings. No early termination fees apply in the event service is terminated in advance of the 12-month duration. Customer is responsible for any accrued service charges in the event service is canceled. Up to 50 Mbps Internet for \$27 is a promotional rate and is valid for 12 months from the date of installation. Up to 300 Mbps Internet for \$37 per month is a promotional rate and is valid for 12 months from the date of installation. Up to 300 Mbps Internet and TV for \$56.53 per month is a promotional rate and is valid for 12 months from the date of installation. TV refers to RCN Limited Basic Cable TV package. Regular monthly retail rates apply thereafter. Equipment not included. Price does not include Network Access Maintenance Fee of \$5.57 per month and is subject to change. This fee is neither government-mandated nor a tax, fee or surcharge imposed by the government. Network Access and Maintenance Fee helps to defray costs associated with building and maintaining RCN's fiber rich broadband network, as well as the costs of expanding network capacity to support the continued increase in customers' average broadband consumption. **\*Minimum speed of 100 Mbps is required.** HDMI-capable TV is needed for TV service. Your TV needs an HDMI output. Customer must be connected to RCN Wi-Fi network to receive RCN Wi-Fi on smartphone or device. Services and pricing are subject to change. All sales subject to credit check. Not all services are available in all areas. **Other restrictions may apply.** Visit <http://www.rcn.com/hub/about-rcn/policies-and-disclaimers> for additional terms and conditions. A trademark of Ziff Davis, LLC. Used under license, where available. Reprinted with permission. © 2021 Ziff Davis, LLC. All Rights Reserved. ©2021 RCN Telecom Services (Lehigh), LLC. All Rights Reserved.