Find new ideas and inspiration

By Karen Klinkefus, The Gazette

Whether you’re thinking about fixing a small problem in your house or undertaking a major renovation, the Cedar Rapids Home Show is the place to get started with ideas and know-how.

Now in its 36th year, the Cedar Rapids Home Show will be held Feb. 27, 28 and March 1 at Hawkeye Downs Expo Center in southwest Cedar Rapids. More than 100 local businesses will be on hand, ready to share their knowledge and expertise about both big and small home improvements. In addition, a handful of new home builders also will be at the Cedar Rapids Home Show.

“Since the economy’s been improving, people are more interested in getting a new home or remodeling where they live now,” says Bill Jackson, Cedar Rapids Home Show organizer.

The Cedar Rapids Home Show will present a number of educational seminars each day. A full seminar schedule is on page 7 of this section.

Cedar Rapids Home Show hours are Friday 5 to 9 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday noon to 5 p.m. Hawkeye Downs is located at 4400 Sixth St. SW. Admission to the Home Show is $5, children 12 and under get in free.
There’s no better time than winter to determine that new windows are needed in your home. Frigid weather often brings cold drafts through inefficient, old windows. Local experts say that air leaks and fogging between panes of glass are two common signs that windows should be replaced.

But determining you need new windows is just the first step. Robert Riley, trade sales rep for Windows by Pella in Cedar Rapids, recommends customers do their homework and seek out reputable businesses to help replace windows. “Too many places promise low prices, and unfortunately they are not always around after a few years to stand by their products under warranty. Sometimes, a cheap price upfront will end up costing you more down the road,” Riley said.

To ensure success in your search, Josh Neuhaus, owner of Window Depot USA of Eastern Iowa, says that there are six factors that you should consider when purchasing windows — price, performance, warranty, craftsmanship, features/benefits and value.

“Value is the most important thing,” Neuhaus said. For example, the investment of purchasing new windows can pay for itself over time in energy savings.

Neuhaus says triple-pane windows are a big seller, as they offer the highest level of efficiency and often the best value.

“New windows and doors are much more efficient than even twenty years ago. Technology has changed so much,” Riley said. He recommends making sure the windows you purchase are Energy Star rated so that you can potentially take advantage of rebates that are often offered through local utility companies.

Aside from the obvious advantage of improved efficiency, customers also can benefit from a choice in style — both wood and vinyl windows are options. “Vinyl replacement windows are more popular because they are maintenance-free. You don’t have to worry about staining or painting down the road, and they are typically less expensive than wood as well,” Riley said.

Other customizable options include a variety of color choices, and special features. Some models offer blinds in between the glass panes to include the built-in convenience of window treatments.

Whatever style, size or model is right for you, one piece of advice applies across the board. As with most home renovation projects, quality workmanship can make or break the finished product. “Installation is important. Even the best windows are not going to be as efficient as possible if they are not installed properly,” Riley said.

Replacing your home’s older windows with new, more energy-efficient windows can dramatically lower your utility bills.
Dreaming of a kitchen or bath remodel?

By Meredith Hines-Dochterman

When it comes to kitchen and bath remodeling projects, convenience is the key word.

From taller vanities in the bathroom to ample storage in the kitchen, homeowners want rooms that work with their space, their needs and, of course, their budgets. According to Ralph Palmer, president of The Ar-Jay Center in Cedar Rapids, it’s these three things homeowners should focus on when planning a kitchen or bath remodeling project — not trends.

“I always tell people to make sure they buy what they want to own because that is what’s in style for them,” Palmer said.

And while the design world might hype certain materials — quartz countertops, open shelving, walk-in showers — that doesn’t necessarily make them trends.

“Countertops and cabinets are fundamental items,” Palmer said. “The trends are the colors. I tell people to select the color they like, and it will last forever.”

If you’re thinking about a kitchen or bath remodeling project, Randy Cullen, project manager for Montauk Construction & Remodel in Cedar Rapids, says the first thing homeowners should do is research: research designers and research contractors.

“Years ago, you were relying on what people told you,” Cullen said. “Now with the Internet, you can look and see who is out there, and the work that they do.”

Homeowners also can use the Internet to get a sense of what they’d like to see in their home. For instance, just because a bathroom has a combination bathtub and shower does not mean it needs to stay that way. These days, not every bathroom remodel means replacing the bathtub.

“You might see a bathtub in the bathroom the whole family uses, but we’re seeing more showers overall, especially in the spaces used by nonfamily members,” Palmer said. “Walk-in showers are especially popular.”

Cullen adds that chandeliers are common in higher-end bathroom remodeling projects, adding that light is something
all homeowners pay attention to.

“People like lights everywhere,” he said.

When it comes to kitchen design, good lighting is just as important as adequate counter space and rollout shelves. Task lighting in the kitchen — on sinks, counters, kitchen islands and pantries — mean no shadows when cooking. However, homeowners who use their kitchen as a place to heat up carryout might choose to spend less on lighting than those who cook from scratch regularly.

“Again, it comes back to the people who live in the space and how they plan to use it,” Palmer said.

“What people want is not always what they can afford,” Cullen added.

Deciding on a budget is another step homeowners must take before diving into a remodeling project. There may be items they want that aren’t in their price range. Figuring this out early in the process can save homeowners heartache and headaches later on.

Speaking of headaches, there’s always a chance of something coming up during the remodeling process. Planning ahead as much as possible can help lessen the possibilities.

Palmer recommends that once homeowners find a designer they like, they take the final plan to the space that’s being remodeled and imagine how it will work. This is especially important in the kitchen, which has more things to store than any other space in the house. Instead of packing things away early to prep for the remodel, Palmer suggests homeowners take kitchen items like pots, baking sheets, and spices, and imagine where they will go in the remodeled space.

“They might just catch something that needs bigger storage or taller storage,” he said.

Cullen adds that taking on a home remodeling job can seem daunting, but at the end of the day, his job is to make sure he makes the process as convenient for his clients as possible.

“It’s important that I remain cool and calm,” Cullen said. “They’ve never done it before, but to me, it’s just another day.”
Find the right flooring for your home

By Maggie Mills

Between pets, kids and normal wear and tear, a home’s floors can take a beating over time. But when is new flooring a good option? And what is the best way to find the perfect floor for your space? Local experts say asking the right questions upfront will help you put your foot on the right flooring.

“Probably the most important thing to remember when looking for new flooring is what you expect of the floor,” said Russ Seaver, store manager for Randy’s Carpets & Interiors in Cedar Rapids. “Do you have children and pets? Parties? What does the future hold? Are you thinking of selling soon?” Seaver says these questions will lead you to discover what kind of qualities you need in your new floor.

“Try to decide what look you want, what you expect of the floor and most importantly what your budget is,” he said.

For those looking for a warm option, carpet is the softest and quietest choice. “A lot of times people have polyester carpets that don’t wear very well. Nylon options wear better, are easier to clean and hold up much better over time,” said Samantha Valenta, flooring specialist at Choice Floors in Cedar Rapids.

If durability and easy maintenance are more important priorities, tile may be your best bet. “Ceramic and porcelain tile are easily the most durable of all flooring types,” Seaver said. “With the new types of grout on the market, they are very easy to maintain and are really a ‘forever’ floor.”

Hardwood flooring, another popular option for those interested in durability, also brings classic style and good return on investment. “Hardwood comes in many different species, with several of the exotic woods being popular today,” Seaver said. “The big trend in hand-scraped wood floors gives many options for color and board-width choices.”

An alternative to the more traditional types of flooring is luxury vinyl tile, or LVT, which has been a popular trend recently. “It’s a little bit softer and warmer than tile, and it doesn’t stain. It’s also a

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lot less expensive than regular tile,” said Valenta. LVT is popular in kitchens, laundry rooms, entryways, and other places where moisture is common. Because it doesn’t require grout, it is also easier to install. “It’s a great product for basements, because it can be picked up, dried and put back down,” she said.

With LVT, traditional tile and carpet alike, many people are leaning toward neutral, modern palettes. “Color-wise, grays seem to be a popular trend,” Valenta said.

No matter what type of flooring you choose, Seaver recommends investing in quality upfront. “Don’t be fooled by extremely low or ‘no cost’ installation advertising. Quality workmanship is never free,” he said.
Top trends in the bath and kitchen for 2015

Here are some highlights from the 2015 Kitchen & Bath Design Trends report from the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA).

Clean, white, contemporary designs continue to be most popular in the bathroom. Floating vanities, open-shelving, electric heated floors and trough sinks continue to grow in popularity. More homeowners are looking for innovative storage like drawer pullouts and rollouts for hair-styling equipment and oral-care appliances. And, although there has been much talk about walk-in showers replacing tubs, many homeowners are still choosing to keep a soaking tub.

The same report from the National Kitchen & Bath Association predicts contemporary designs will continue to rule in the kitchen. Other trends to watch include multiples of appliances in one kitchen (think two dishwasher drawers), the use of steam ovens, furniture-look pieces, outdoor kitchens, fewer standard-height kitchen tables and more counters or tall tables.

Last, but not least, more homeowners are looking to make their kitchens more accommodating to every member of the family, including the pets. Many remodeled kitchens now include a special alcove for Fido, the family dog, or Socks, the cat.

The Gazette
Keeping the basement dry

By Meredith Hines-Dochterman

With all the snow we’ve had this winter, many Eastern Iowa homeowners are worried that their basements may not stay dry come spring.

Paul Hynek, owner of Hynek Landscaping in Swisher, will present a seminar at the Cedar Rapids Home Show entitled “Managing Your Home’s Water Drainage.” Hynek will talk about the many options homeowners have in keeping water away from their foundation in the first place.

“When it comes to water drainage, the more you put off doing things the proper way, the bigger the problems get,” Hynek says.

Randy Oxley, president of All Eastern Iowa Seamless Gutter in Cedar Rapids, agrees.

“The biggest problems we see are that gutters are not properly installed or they don’t have extensions that go at least five feet away from the house,” Oxley says. “We’ve solved thousands of problems by making sure the gutters and drains are properly installed in the first place.”

There are ways to tell if water drainage is an issue before the basement floods, especially in the spring when melting snow and rain increase the likelihood of water damage. Hynek recommends homeowners walk the perimeter of their home, looking for areas of spongy grass. This is an early indicator that there’s a water drainage problem.

Regular gutter maintenance is another way homeowners can protect their homes.

“Homeowners should clean their gutters out twice a year,” Oxley says. “The rule of thumb is once in the spring, typically anywhere from March 1 through April 1, and again in September or October. It’s important the gutters are cleaned out before winter so when the snow melts, it drains properly.”

Another option is to install a mesh system over your gutters. Oxley invented his own system, Ox Mesh Leaf Protection, which is locally made. The fine stainless steel mesh membrane keeps anything larger than 85 microns — that’s smaller than 0.1 millimeter — from getting in the gutter.

At the seminar, Hynek will discuss a variety of water management services, including foundation tiling, surface grading, surface drains, French drains, gutter and downspout systems, foundation rock beds, and sump pump installation and maintenance.

“I’ll cover pretty much everything possible in the time I’m given,” he says. “I want homeowners to be well-informed.”

“Managing Your Home’s Water Drainage” will be presented at the Cedar Rapids Home Show at 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 27, and at 11 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 28.
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