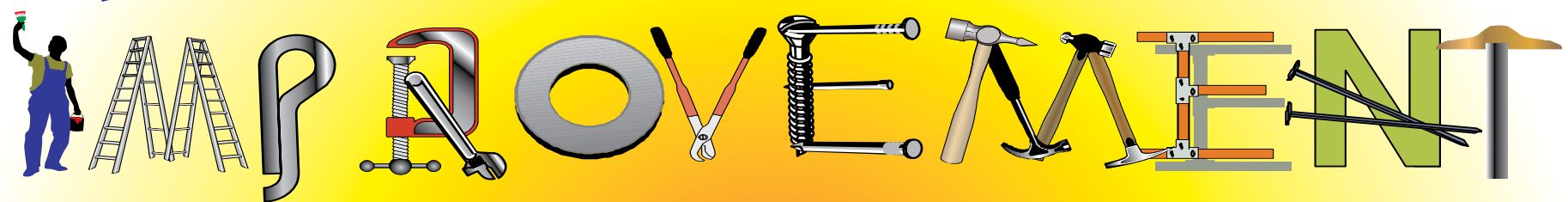


Spring



OUTDOOR LIVING

Weighing your deck options

Your budget, tolerance for maintenance, and choice of materials all key to planning

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

REGIONAL— A North Country summer is too short not to spend as much of it outside as possible. And few things can make your time outside more enjoyable, be it by yourself or with friends, than spending it on an attractive new deck.

Whether it's time spent at the lake, or a pleasant evening in town, a deck is great for entertaining or just relaxing. These days, decks are significantly expanding our living area, and they've grown in size, says CJ Roesch, sales manager at Cook Building Center.

"On the lake, they've gotten huge," he said. A large deck is a sizable investment,

which means homeowners will want to spend some time weighing their building options, and whether it's a DIY project or time to call an experienced local contractor.

As usual, you'll want to consider a number of factors, including the technical difficulty of the project, your budget, and your tolerance level for maintenance, because these all weigh into your planning.

Most of us can take on a small, single-level deck, particularly if you're planning it at ground level. Most of these are built on a modest budget, often with treated deck lumber, which is pretty forgiving as a building material.

But once you start looking

See **DECKING...pg. 2C**



Above: A multi-level deck can be highly-attractive, but the technical difficulty of construction means it's likely a job for an experienced contractor. That's especially true if you're considering manufactured decking, which is more difficult to work with than typical lumber.

Left: Manufactured decking comes in a wide range of colors and widths.

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DECKING...Continued from page 1C

at large, elevated decks, with staircases and/or multiple levels, you're quickly getting outside the comfort level of the average homeowner. Throw in a desire to utilize manufactured decking, or a dense tropical hardwood, and the level of skill required for success has jumped once again.

But just because you're calling in a contractor doesn't mean your job is over. You'll need to work with your builder on the design, on the budget, and on the all-important selection of materials.

And there's more to choose from in terms of materials these days, so you'll want to think about your priorities and your budget as you determine which materials to choose.

Here's a rundown of your building material choices, from least expensive to most expensive.

Treated lumber

While treated dimensional lumber is commonly used for the deck support structures, treated wood decking is also widely available. For the budget conscious, this is a solid option, even though it doesn't live up to the aesthetic appeal or the longevity of some other alternatives. Treated decking typically comes in a five-quarter-inch thick board, five and a half inches wide, and it provides a stable deck in most cases on a 24-inch-center support system.

It's easy to install, since

standard decking screws go right through the soft wood without splitting or cracking. Once laid, give it a year to weather and then use a good quality deck stain to finish it off. Depending on how much sun your deck receives in the summer, you'll need to refinish every few years to keep it looking good. Even so, treated wood decking has been known to crack and warp over time, so you may have to replace boards as that happens.

Manufactured lumber

The quality of manufactured, often called "plastic", decking has increased a lot over the years, often through trial and error on the part of manufacturers. Some of the early products were a mix of wood fiber and plastic, and some still are, but they've had their share of problems, said Roesch, and makers have since modified their products. Roesch said wood decking made by AZEK is a top seller at Cook Building Center, in part because it's 100 percent PVC, which prevents the kind of degradation that used to be more common among wood fiber composites.

The product comes in a range of colors, with realistic wood grain, and the line also comes with a full line of options for accompanying railings and other accessories in different styles that help to ensure a final product that fits your design preferences.



Going with manufactured decking provides a virtually maintenance-free future for your deck, other than a springtime power wash or mopping to get the winter's accumulated crud washed off in preparation for another season. Keep in mind that manufactured decking isn't like traditional wood, and that's one more reason to consider an experienced contractor if you want to go this route. You'll need to bolster your support structure (Roesch recommends building on 16-inch centers) and you'll need to determine which route to go for connecting your decking to your supports. Most manufactured decking is attached with hidden screws or clips.

While manufactured

decking has a number of advantages, it does cost substantially more than treated decking, more in line with cedar decking, our next consideration.

Cedar

For some, the look and feel of cedar is simply part of the deck experience, and Roesch acknowledges he has customers who won't consider anything else. For sheer beauty, it's tough to beat. And cedar takes a stain well and is naturally resistant to rot, which means it will last for years. And while wood often requires more maintenance, some folks simply let their cedar weather naturally to a light grey color that resists weather almost as long as any product.

In the past, cedar maintained

Left: The look of real cedar is enticing for many, which is why this continues to be a favorite decking material for some.

its popularity in part because it was a cheaper alternative than most manufactured products. But Roesch said the price of cedar has jumped sharply this year (he suggests tariffs may have something to do with that), which makes it about the same price as the manufactured product.

For the die-hards, that probably won't matter. But it just might get some folks to take another look at an alternative.

Tropical hardwoods

Expensive and currently hard to find, these tropical woods are beautiful and last for decades with relatively little maintenance. For those for whom cost and concerns over environmental sustainability are not factors, varieties such as Brazilian tigerwood or the dark, dense wood known as ipe, are popular because of their smooth, lustrous wood feel and appearance.

Working with such woods, however, is difficult and time-consuming. They are heavy, and so dense that holes for screws or nails must be pre-drilled. Of course, if you're going to spend this kind of money, you'll probably be leaving those details to a contractor.

OUTDOOR LIVING

Add garden space, beauty and ease with elevated beds

by MELINDA MYERS
Gardening expert

Elevate your gardens to waist high level for convenience and easy access. Elevated gardens are easy on your back and knees and are perfect for the patio, balcony,

deck or any area where a bit of planting space is desired. Place them near your kitchen door, grill or table for easy cooking and serving access. You'll be able to plant, weed and harvest with minimal bending or even from a chair. Purchase one on wheels

or add casters to the legs of your elevated garden for added mobility. Then wheel it into the sun or shade as needed each day or out of the way when you entertain.

Set the garden in place first. Once it's filled with soil, it will be very heavy

and difficult to move. Those gardening on a balcony should confirm the space will hold the weight of the elevated garden you select when filled with soil and mature plants.

Make sure you have easy

See **GARDENS...pg. 4C**



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DOING IT YOURSELF

Sauna shower renovation finally got traction

I'd imagine that in every home, there's a needed improvement that's just too easy to ignore. I know around our house, it was the redo of the sauna shower that was crying out for attention. There was a time when not much got between me and a home improvement project, but this one just wasn't calling out to me as in my younger days.

I've been telling myself it's because I'm older and wiser, less impulsive than in my youth. Such projects, I reasoned, take time to mature. You need to think on it. Do a little research. Explore a few ideas. Seek inspirational designs. And, of course, consider your schedule. I'm a DIY guy, after all. If it's going to get done, I'll be the one to do the doing.

It can, I acknowledge, approach the definition of procrastination. In my defense, renovation is often a trickier task than new construction, since you are often living within the limitations imposed by the previous construction.

In my case, I had two objectives—creating an attractive shower for everyday use and keeping the overall sauna cleaner. The old shower was simply a shower head that came out of one wall of the sauna with a bit of tile around it. It didn't have its own drain. When you ran the shower, the water flowed across the tile or concrete into the sauna's main drain, getting various things wet along the way. It wasn't a disaster... it just wasn't ideal.

The shower had actually been out of commission for a couple years, which meant we used buckets of water



MARSHALL HELMBERGER



Left: The finished shower, showing the fixtures and, above, the finished shower showing the bench.

Below: The original shower, with chipped tile, in desperate need of replacement.



in sauna. That's the traditional way, of course, and it works great on sauna nights, but it wasn't as convenient for a quick shower at other times. Yet it was one of those "good 'nuf" situations where it's so easy to let it go another week, then another month, and, you know the rest... pretty soon we're dead and it doesn't matter anymore. (Please ignore that last comment; I don't know where that came from.)

Anyway, the stars finally aligned in late March. I mustered what remains of my youthful enthusiasm and dove in head first. As I had learned from my research, building a shower stall

is pretty basic construction, involving stud walls, water resistant materials, and a waterproof shower pan. In my case, because I wanted the shower to have its own drain, I had to elevate the shower stall several inches to accommodate the drain pipe, which connected up to the main sauna drain. That meant building a platform about eight inches high, then attaching my walls to the perimeter. I used two existing walls of the sauna, and added two more walls, with a doorway through one of them, and I had my stall framed up. I also

See **SHOWER...**pg. 4C

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SHOWER...Continued from page 3C

added a bench so you can sit inside the shower because, well, you know, Jodi isn't getting any younger.

Then came the only really tricky part, which was only tricky because I hadn't done it before. Making your shower pan involves laying a couple layers of mortar with a heavy rubber liner sandwiched in between. There's a two-part drain unit that you'll need as part of the whole process. I'd describe it in more detail, except there are no end of helpful videos on the subject on youtube. If you haven't discovered youtube as a great reference for home projects, or just about anything else, you're missing out. From do-it-yourself laser eye surgery to making your own stone tools, no topic is too obscure. Still, I'd leave the eye surgery to an actual surgeon.

If you're looking for hands-on assistance, you can find a helpful, life-sized model of a cross-section of a shower pan at Floor to Ceiling in Virginia, which is where I bought my tile, grout, rubber liner, and other supplies. I snapped a photo of it with my phone and referred back to it regularly as I completed the pan.

I'd worked with cement and mortar plenty of times in the past, but you have to use what's known as a "dry pack" for your shower pan. This involves using only a small amount of water in your mortar. It should be able to



Above: The stall and bench framed in and the first layer of dry-packed mortar in place. The mortar should be flush with the first part of the two-part drain system. You'll screw on the second part of the drain once the mortar is set.

Right: The second layer of mortar going in on top of the heavy rubber liner. Note that I extended the liner all the way up over the bench so water won't seep in through that portion of the shower. Also note that the waterproof cement board is attached to the vertical walls on top of the liner. Then the second round of mortar is packed tight against the cement board.

pack, like slightly thawed snow, but that's all. You just spread it out and pound it (hard!) to pack it into place. I used a 12-inch piece of two-by-four to do most of the pounding. Once it's packed pretty well, you can start working it with a cement trowel to even it out. You'll want to be sure your drain is located at the center and that the whole pan slopes, just slightly (about a quarter-inch per

foot), toward the drain.

Once your dry-packed pan is set, you need to make sure your plumbing fixtures are in place. Then it's time to tile. I was amazed at all the tile options, and ultimately selected porcelain tile that's nearly indistinguishable from weathered wood. With some nice accent tile, it's given my new shower a "rustic chic" look that I like a lot.



I used small, natural, polished stones for the shower floor. These are also available at Floor to Ceiling and come in roughly 12-foot square sheets with the stones already attached with appropriate spacing. You lay them into a relatively heavy set of mortar, add a pretty thick layer of grout between them, and you have a very attractive, natural-looking floor.

After that, I added some

dark, salvaged cedar trim, protected with exterior polyurethane, did a final install of my new fixtures, added a surface-mount LED light on the ceiling and I was ready to go, with a couple weeks to spare before our annual Home Improvement special section.

Now I just can't wait to get dirty!

GARDEN...Continued from page 2C

access to water. Since this is basically a container, you will need to check the soil moisture daily and water thoroughly as needed. Fill the elevated garden with a well-drained planting mix that holds moisture while providing needed drainage.

Grow a variety of your favorite herbs and vegetables like basil, parsley, compact tomatoes, and

peppers. Support vining plants or try compact ones like Mascotte compact bush bean. Add color and dress up your planter with flowers like edible nasturtiums and trailing herbs like thyme and oregano that will cascade over the edge of the planter.

Maximize your growing space by planting quick maturing vegetables like radishes, beets and

lettuce in between tomatoes, peppers, cabbage and other vegetables that take longer to reach their mature size. You'll be harvesting the short-season vegetables just as the bigger plants need the space.

Further increase your garden's productivity with succession plantings. Fill vacant spaces that are left once a row or block of

vegetables are harvested. Add more planting mix if needed.

Select seeds and transplants that will have time to reach maturity for harvesting before the growing season ends. Broccoli, cabbage, compact Patio Pride peas, lettuce, spinach and other greens taste best when harvested in cooler fall temperatures.

Replace weather-worn

flowers with cool weather beauties like pansies, nemesisias, dianthus, alyssum and snapdragons. Fertilize the whole planter so plants have the nutrients they need to grow all season.

Protect your fall flowers, herbs and vegetables from hard frosts with floating row covers. These fabrics allow air, light and water to come through, while trapping

the heat around the plant.

Once you discover the fun, flavor and ease of waist-high gardening, you'll likely make room for more elevated planters for your future gardening endeavors.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including *Small Space Gardening*.



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SENIOR LIVING

For seniors, improving home safety is key

REGIONAL—Feeling safe and secure at home is a priority for any homeowner. But safety is of particular concern for aging men and women who are at greater risk of being involved in accidents at home than younger men and women.

Harvard Health Publishing says that accidents at home are among the leading causes of injury and death in the United States. The chance for fatalities increases as one ages, and by age 75 and older, men and women are almost four times as likely to die in a home accident as people a decade younger.

As people age, their balance, eyesight and general physical abilities can begin to diminish. Furthermore, a fall or incident that may only bruise a younger individual can cause more serious breaks or damage for seniors,

resulting in potentially lengthy recovery times.

The Home Care Assistance organization says that one million elderly people are admitted to the emergency room for injuries every year. People concerned about the safety of their homes or the homes of their aging loved ones can retrofit such properties to make them safer.

Falls

According to The Senior Social Club, which offers care and community services to seniors, falls are the most common accidents affecting seniors. One out of every three seniors aged 65 and older falls at least once a year.

In addition to working with doctors to improve mobility and modify medications that may cause unsteadiness, changes around the home can help. Grab bars placed in bath-

rooms and high-traffic areas can help seniors stay more stable when changing from sitting to standing positions.

Potential tripping hazards should be assessed. Area rugs without nonskid backings, clutter on floors, extension cords that extend into walking areas, and uneven flooring pose tripping hazards. Anti-slip coatings can be added to floors to reduce the risk of tripping.

Poorly lit staircases and entryways also can contribute to falls. Consider the installation of motion-activated lighting so that dim areas can be automatically brightened when necessary.

Physical limitations

Arthritis can impede seniors' ability to turn on and off appliances and water faucets, or handle certain kitchen tools. Kitchen and bathroom modifications can include the installation of

ergonomic and user-friendly handles and spigots.

Task lighting can make it easier to prepare meals, and appliances that automatically turn off after a certain period of time can be a safety feature for forgetful individuals.

Reorganize kitchen cabinets to make commonly-used items more accessible.

Smart Homes

Friends or family members can have greater control over seniors' homes by installing smart home systems. This way they can remotely adjust thermostats, control lights, view cameras, engage locks or alarm systems, and much more, without having to be at the home. This can allow seniors to maintain their independence while offering peace of mind to their loved ones.



For seniors or for those of us nearing our golden years, it's time to start thinking about home improvements that will make our home safer.

Five ways to make homes safer

REGIONAL — Injuries that occur around the home contribute to millions of medical visits and tens of thousands of fatalities each year. As homeowners prepare for home-improvement projects, improving safety inside and outside the home should be a priority.

1. Improve lighting

One of the easiest ways to reduce the risk of falls is to improve lighting around the home. Adequate lighting is important at entrances to the home, stairways, hallways, and other frequently traversed areas. Make sure lighting fixtures are using the highest wattage light bulb allowed. Artificial lighting sources become even more vital in fall and

winter, when natural light is less abundant in a home. In addition, install lighting outdoors by the front door, over the garage and where garbage pails are stored, to facilitate safe passage.

2. Eliminate slick surfaces

Improving traction around the house also can minimize falls. Throw rugs and runners can be made more secure with nonslip rubber backings. Bath rugs can reduce slipping on wet surfaces in the bathroom. Also, nonslip mats can be used inside of showers and bathtubs.

Use shoe trays to reduce puddling from melting snow or rain runoff in entryways. Mop up spills quickly, and consider the use of textured-fin-

ished flooring to improve stability underfoot.

Promptly remove snow and ice from driveways and walkways. For those who live in cold climates, heated concrete can help melt precipitation before it accumulates.

3. Make needed repairs

Repair loose floorboards and pull carpet taut if it has started to stretch out. Address cracks outdoors and ensure that patio stones, bricks and pavers are secure and level to reduce tripping hazards. Fix areas of the landscape where water may pool and freeze, creating potential hazards.

4. Declutter all spaces

Remove unnecessary items and furniture from

rooms to free up more space to get around. Be sure there are no obstructions in walkways, entryways and near doors. Keep staircases clear at all times.

5. Invest in assistive devices

Handrails, grab bars, nonslip stair treads, and many other devices can make homes safer for people of all ages and abilities. Outfit cabinets and closets with organizers that put frequently used items within easy reach. A sturdy stepstool can reduce the risk of injury while reaching for items stored on high shelves.



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Tapping the potential

Imagination and initiative convert a wet basement to a remarkable renovation

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

TOWER— Undertaking a major renovation wasn't on Orlyn Kringstad's to-do list when he and his wife Marit bought a small, older home on the north side of Tower three years ago. The 1,100-square foot main level was tiny compared to the 3,000-square foot home they were leaving in Bloomington, but as they eased into their 60s and 70s, the couple was looking to downsize.

They envisioned the upstairs as living space, with the unfinished basement remaining more or less as is, providing space for utilities and dry storage.

But in life things happen. And when they discovered the downstairs was wetter than they had expected, they turned to a contractor to assist in the installation of drain tile around the inside perimeter of the basement. It was an arduous task, but as Orlyn spent day after day working in the basement, he started to see the potential, particularly as the drain tile did its job, leaving behind a downstairs that no longer suffered from wet floors or the mustiness common in most old basements. He suddenly had a vision for what was possible— and it's a testament to imagination.

The starting point was hardly inspiring. Like many older basements in the North Country, this one was entirely unfinished, consisting of bare concrete walls, low ceilings with exposed joists, wiring and plumbing. Old wooden and metal support posts and various utilities, including the furnace, water heater, and sump pump, were scattered here and there. This was no minor project. Achieving Orlyn's vision would consume a full year.

"Though a lot of that was thinking time," says Orlyn, who had to devise solutions to a long list of challenges along the way.

Among them was raising all



Left: Marit and Orlyn Kringstad in the newly-renovated basement of their home in Tower.

Below: The finished basement now includes a bathroom which serves the two guest bedrooms.



See RENOVATION...pg. 7C

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RENOVATION...Continued from page 6C

of the copper plumbing and wiring that had been installed on the underside of the basement's ceiling joists. Dropping the ceiling to cover that infrastructure was never a possibility, at least not if the space was going to be used by normal-sized adults.

To ensure that the basement was comfortable, Orlyn furred out the concrete walls with 2x4s laid flat against the wall. The space this provided allowed for the addition of foam insulation as well as wiring to add electrical outlets and other fixtures where none had existed in the past. Finally, he covered the 2x4s with sheetrock for the finished wall.

He also installed in-floor heating, using a plastic grid that held pex tubing, which was then covered with a quarter-inch underlayment, a thin layer of rolled foam, and, finally, a floating, wood-look laminate flooring. He even put insulation between the ceiling joists, which helps maintain a constant temperature in the downstairs and provides an effective barrier to sound. Orlyn then used an attractive, grayish tongue-and-groove paneling on the ceiling and inset recessed LED lighting throughout the downstairs.

He planned to add two bedrooms as part of the project and in order to meet code, he installed two egress windows, which was complicated by the fact that he had to do the work in winter, some of which involved outside excavation and cement work. That was probably the biggest challenge of the entire project, says Orlyn.

"But I think what I'm most proud of are the beams," he said.

The existing beams were functional but were twisted and riddled with old nails. They would clearly never fit with the finished look that Orlyn had in mind. Rather than remove them, he built a framed-in structure around them and sided them with ten-inch wide boards running lengthwise. He mitered them along each joining corner, giving them the appearance of much larger, real beams. The effect is striking and they've become a focal point of the project.

Another focal point is the fireplace inset and mantel he installed in the living area. A large flat-screen television is perched just above.

Not wanting utilities like the furnace or water heater to mar the aesthetic appeal of his project, Orlyn relocated all of the equipment and even dug a new sump in a small closet tucked into a back corner of the basement.

Even with the occasional help of a contractor for portions of the project, it was a huge undertaking, which Orlyn estimates cost about \$40,000.

It's money that will almost certainly come back

See **PROJECT...**pg. 8C

Before & After



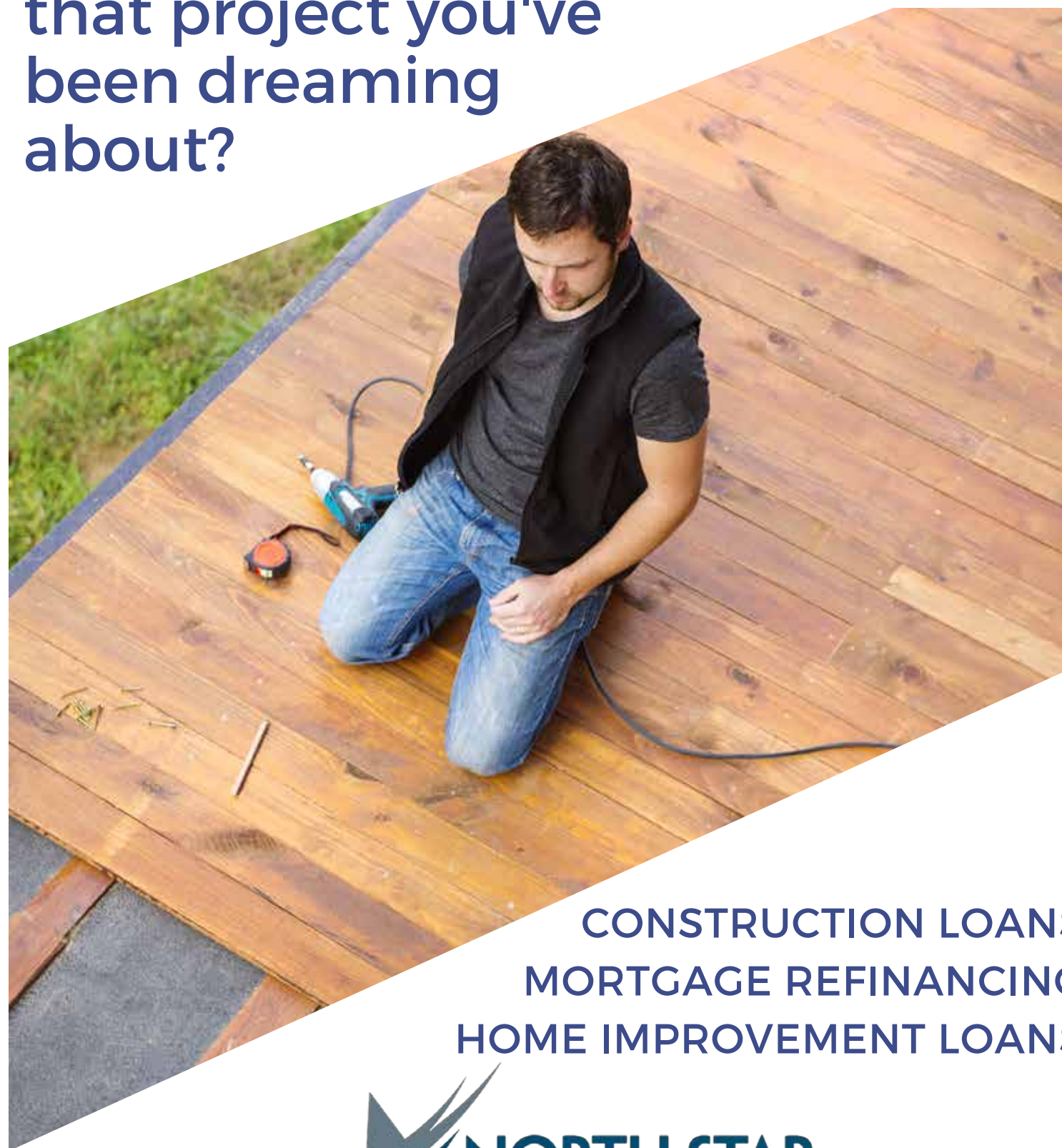
Top: The basement as it was prior to the renovation with work underway to install drain tile around the inside perimeter, and below, the same space converted to Orlyn's new office.



Top: The original basement staircase, and below, the staircase transformed.



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Before & After



PROJECT...Continued from page 7C

Left: The original fireplace, and, lower left, the renovated space.

Right: An old work space converted to a new guest bedroom.

through increased home value as the residence has been transformed from an 1,100-square foot, two bedroom, one bath home into a beautiful and tasteful four bedroom, two bath, 2,300-square foot home that is comfortable on both levels, with room for entertaining and overnight guests.

For Marit, the transformation of the downstairs has provided a new canvas for her decorating skills and a showcase for the wide array of Nordic antiques and family heirlooms that the Kringstads have accumulated over the years.

The big picture

While a major home renovation can seem a daunting task, Orlyn advises focusing on the key elements first. It's a lesson he's learned through numerous home renovations he's undertaken in



the past. "The A-number one thing you have to do is sit down and look at what really needs to be done for a long-term fix. Look at what needs to be done to make it long-term, livable, and maintenance free."

In the case of his basement project, Orlyn said fixing the leakage problem, ensuring that the

walls were stable and that the electrical and plumbing were relocated and out of the way, were the top priorities.

"All of those things of necessity come first," he said. "And most of the money will go into things that you'll hopefully never see again."

Once the required

work is done, that's when you let your creative side run with it, based on your available budget. "Then it's just a matter of having a vision of what you want. The building part is pretty straightforward."

BEFORE YOU START A PROJECT

Surviving a home renovation: things to consider first

REGIONAL - 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.

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 first

All family members should be in agreement before the first hammer is swung. Decide on as many details as you can ahead of time and have a firm plan in place. Establish back-up choices for tiles or color schemes in case the items you want are out of stock. Trying to make decisions under duress may result in bad choices.

One project at a time

It's tempting to want to improve as much as possible at once to maximize motivation and renovation materials. However, having no place in which to escape the mess can elevate stress levels. Do not think about renovating kitchens and bathrooms all at once, or you will not have any working fixtures for tasks like washing up.

Be ready to start

Before demolition even begins, have building materials bought and stored, contractors and subcontractors lined up, and see what you can do to minimize the time workers need to spend in your home.

Expect delays

In a world where things move at lightning speeds, renovations have not gotten the memo. Home projects take lots of time and will likely take longer if you are doing the work yourself in your free time. Build lots of extra time into the project so you are not disappointed when delays happen — even when you've done your best to avoid them.

Plan an escape zone

Construction environments can be messy, loud, smelly, and a host of other unsavory adjectives. The chaos that ensues when life is turned upside down can be overwhelming, particularly for the person who spends the most time in the home while work is being done. Build escape moments into the plan and



Planning, patience and an understanding of what the project entails can make home improvements easier to survive.

make sure everyone else at home is on board. During the real grind of the project, a night or two at a hotel may be a welcome respite.



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SPEND MORE TIME OUTSIDE

Lots of ways to improve your outdoor living spaces

REGIONAL- The popularity of outdoor living spaces has been growing for years. A 2014 study from the home remodeling and design platform Houzz found that 56 percent of homeowners were making updates to improve their yards for entertaining. Similarly, nearly 60 percent of architectural practices surveyed by the American Institute of Architects in 2016 said outdoor living spaces were popular features in the homes they built.

Outdoor living spaces may also be sound investments for homeowners looking to improve the resale value of their properties. According to Remodeling magazine's 2017 "Cost vs. Value" report, outdoor living spaces returned between 55 and 71 percent of homeowners' initial investments at resale.

When planning an outdoor living space, homeowners with ample backyards have much to work with. However, to make the most of the space while simultaneously hoping to get as strong a return on their investments as possible, homeowners should look to create spaces that offer broad appeal and are not too personalized. The following



are some popular outdoor living space features homeowners may want to consider.

Outdoor kitchens

Outdoor kitchens allow homeowners to prepare more than just traditional backyard barbecue fare. A stand-alone charcoal grill in the backyard might get the job done, but a

built-in gas grill complete with burners and surrounding granite countertop makes for a more functional outdoor entertaining space.

Bars

Indoor entertaining areas often include bars, so it makes sense that homeowners want to include a place to prepare and

serve beverages to their guests outdoors. Homeowners with room in their budgets may want to install wet bars where they can rinse mixers, glasses and other items needed to prepare drinks for their guests.

Warming features

Features that can keep homeowners and their guests

warm after the sun sets include outdoor fireplaces and firepits. A 2016 survey conducted by the American Society of Landscape Architects found that fireplaces and firepits were the most popular outdoor design element in 2016. Such features can provide a focal point in the backyard while also extending the outdoor living season into autumn and even early winter.

Porch space

Outdoor living spaces are often found in the backyard, but homeowners with bigger front yards than backyards may want to expand or open their porch spaces to create more space outside. Porch swings and rocking chairs provide a great place to relax, and porch spaces are covered, meaning homeowners can continue to enjoy time outside even when it begins to rain.

Outdoor living spaces are growing in popularity. Homeowners who want to capitalize on this trend can do so in various ways.

Spring cleaning can help alleviate seasonal allergies inside the home

REGIONAL - Allergies affect people of all ages. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology reports that allergic rhinitis affects between 10 and 30 percent of the world's population. In addition, the prevalence of allergic diseases has risen in industrialized nations for more than 50 years.

Seasonal allergies tend to be the strongest in spring and autumn. Allergies can be exacerbated by many factors, including in homes where improvements are being made. Regular housecleaning can remove many common allergy triggers and help alleviate symptoms. Knowing which common home improvement mistakes can aggravate allergies can help homeowners avoid them.

Suit up

Before any cleaning begins, allergy sufferers should don face masks and rubber gloves to prevent themselves from breathing in allergens or having them touch their hands, where they can be transferred to the face or elsewhere. Those cleaning should also wear clothes that can be

easily removed and laundered after a day's work.

Clean windows one at a time

Prolonged exposure to outdoor allergens, such as pollen, mold or ragweed, can aggravate allergies. Therefore, if windows are being cleaned, do one at a time and then promptly close the window. Having the air conditioning running can help filter the air as well.

Use exhaust fans

The AAAAI recommends using an exhaust fan in the kitchen and bathrooms to reduce the levels of moisture in these rooms and filter out potential allergens and odors. Moisture can eventually lead to the growth of mold and mildew, which isn't healthy for anyone, including allergy sufferers, to breathe in.

Invest in a HEPA filter

Vacuums with HEPA filters can trap allergens that are so small that they pass through regular vacuum filters. That means instead of containing them, these small particles are



only being shot back into the air where they are easily breathed in. WebMD suggests vacuuming once or twice a week to keep carpets and floors as clean as possible. Plus, don't forget to vacuum upholstered furniture and drapes as well.

Launder hot

When it comes time to wash linens, do so in hot water, which can kill dust mites residing in sheets and blankets. Employ mattress covers to further protect against dust mite allergies.

Shampoo smart

Shampooing a carpet may cause moisture to become trapped in the carpet fibers, leading to increased dust mites or mold growth. Spot-clean stains instead. Otherwise,

hire a professional cleaner who will clean and dry the carpet as quickly as possible.

Damp dust

When cleaning up dust or home renovation debris, use a damp cloth or a vinegar solution to wipe down surfaces. This helps trap small particles instead of sending them into the air.

Treat mold issues

Mold can trigger allergic reactions, so it is best to keep it out of a home. Solutions that contain at least 10 percent bleach can be effective at killing mold, but it's best to prevent mold from growing entirely. That means keeping tabs on any moisture issues and addressing them immediately.



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START SMALL

Complete these home improvements over the weekend

REGIONAL- Home improvement projects ramp up when the weather warms up, as homeowners channel the rejuvenating feelings of spring and tackle their home to-do lists. Large-scale renovations can greatly affect a home, but smaller projects can yield impressive results and be completed over the course of a single weekend.

If time is of the essence, these weekend or one-day projects may satisfy homeowners' desires to fix up their homes.

► Create an accent wall. Painting a focal wall in a home can create a serious impact. The bonus is it will not take as long or require as many materials as painting an entire room. Accent walls frequently feature a bold color, so decide on placement and tackle this project in less than a day.

► Install stair runners. Dress up hardwood stairs with decorative carpet runners. Runners come in elongated pieces of carpeting or individual pieces that can be placed on each step. If carpeting doesn't fit with the home's design, painting individual stair treads also can create visual appeal.

► Dress up the entryway. An entryway is a guest's first impression of a home. Many entryways

can use a minor overhaul, both inside and outside. Paint the front door a different color so it pops from the curb. Install a new mailbox or decorative house numbers. A new welcome mat can change the look as well. Inside, consider laying a new floor. Resilient vinyl tiles come in many different patterns and can mimic the look of wood, travertine or marble. Installing a floor can take a day or two.

► Install a new faucet. Instantly improve a kitchen or a bathroom with new fixtures. New faucets can provide aesthetic appeal and low-flow faucets can help conserve water.

► Create a gallery on the staircase. Gather and arrange framed photos, artwork or wall accents so that they ascend the wall of a staircase. This creates a designer touch and can dress up an often barren area of wall space.

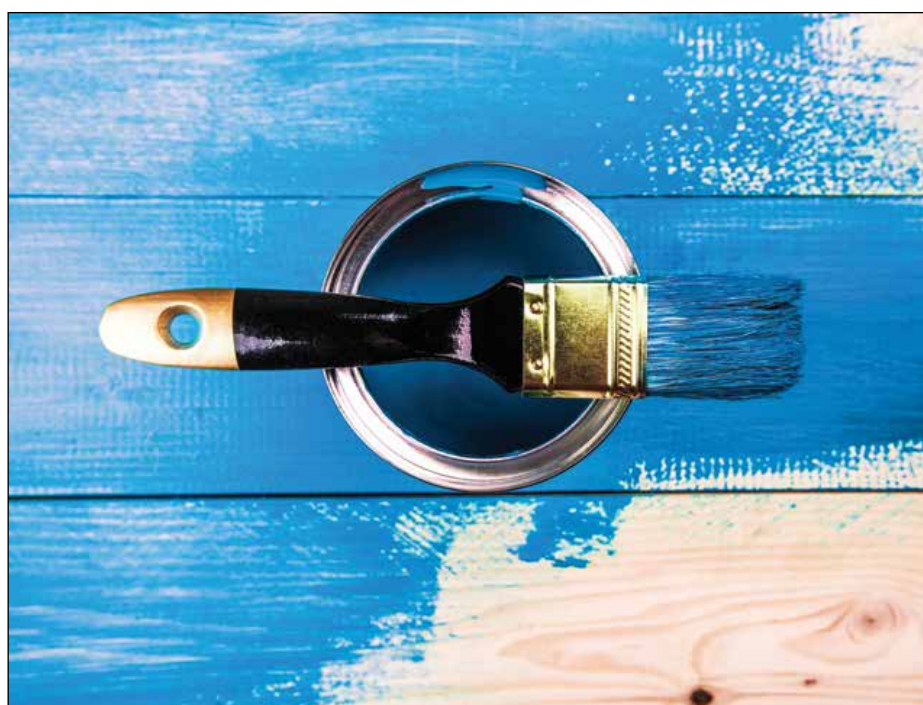
► Install a fresh light fixture. Improve drab spaces with a little illumination. Better Homes & Gardens suggests replacing an existing fixture with something new and vibrant. If hanging a new fixture is not within one's skill set, free-standing table or floor lamps also can cast a new glow on a space.

► Add molding. Molding can add instant

aesthetic appeal to a room. Molding is appropriate near the floor, at the top of walls where they meet the ceiling, or even mid-wall as a chair rail. Some homeowners like to create framed molding on walls in formal living spaces.

► Update kitchen or bathroom hardware. Replacing hardware is a fast and easy project, but one that can have immediate impact. Swap out tired or outdated hardware for newer brushed metals and more impactful shapes and designs.

Home renovations do not need to take weeks or months. Many projects can be completed over the course of a weekend.



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