

SETTING THE STAGE

WHETHER YOU ARE MOVING INTO A NEW SPACE OR JUST LOOKING FOR DECORATING TIPS TO SPRUCE UP YOUR HOME, WE HAVE THE CREATIVE SOLUTIONS YOU'RE LOOKING FOR. READ ON FOR OVERCOMING COMMON HOME AND DESIGN CHALLENGES.

Stories by Brielle Gregory, Kelsey Husnick, Eartha Terrell and Molly Wilson



HOUSE HUNTERS

PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND EXPERT STAGING ADVICE CAN HELP CLOSE THE DEAL.

WHEN BROWSING HOME listings, the pages of houses up for grabs are typically dotted with photos that make them look like lavish vacation get-aways. But those glossy photos you see when flipping through home listings don't just happen. They're created by intricate design and photographed by people like Amy Rizer.

Rizer is the owner and photographer of Homes by Amy, a real estate photography company based out of Canfield that started four years ago. Rizer, who attended art school at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, got into real estate photography when she began selling her personal homes. She found herself often unhappy with the photos real estate agents were taking of her homes, so she took things into her own hands. After photographing her own homes, then moving on to photos for friends, Rizer formed connections with local agents and decided to expand her traditional portrait photography into home photography.

"It's the first thing that a buyer sees online," says Rizer. "It's the first presentation of the property, and you want it to be its best. So we really strive to give a great presence of the home." Because photos are the first impression of a home, Rizer says, buyers will click right by a home without a second thought if the house has poor photos.

The first five photos are particularly important because they're what intrigue the buyer into forming real interest in the home.

But Rizer's job isn't just about snapping the photos. She's also responsible for staging the home for shots, which means arranging the home to showcase and accent its best parts. Rizer, who has a home staging certification, clears homes of clutter and brings in lighting to make the homes have optimal appeal. "We try to set it up as the most open floor plan possible," she says.

If you're looking to sell your home and want to make your home look move-in ready, Rizer says, the key is to keep things neutral and remove any clutter. "Try to get rid of any knick-knacks or items so the buyers can see themselves moving into that home," says Rizer. She also recommends moving out any rugs so you can see the floors, clearing off counters and giving the walls a fresh coat of a neutral paint color.

"I've heard so much lately that a home sells [in] five, six, 10 days because of my photos," says Rizer. "So that makes me happy. [Selling a home] is a very stressful process, so if that can be shortened, that's great."

» 7 Court St., Suite 150, Canfield, 330-730-6993, amyrizersphoto.com

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Get your patio in tip-top shape for a season of entertaining with advice from Masonry Materials Plus.

IF PATIO PLANS are on your agenda this spring, staying local may be your best bet, says Masonry Materials Plus representative Bill Traynor. MMP specializes in serving the masonry industry, selling materials, such as brick, concrete block and stone, while representing many of the major brick manufacturers in the area since 1986.

"Many of the best products are the ones produced locally. Most of the concrete and clay pavers we sell are quarried out locally and manufactured at a local plant. They have been tested against industry standards and most are rated for wheel traffic [meaning they can be used as a driveway or parking lot]," he says.

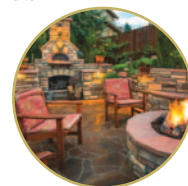
To create an intimate space for gatherings with friends and family, Traynor suggests opting for a fire pit, fire-place and outdoor pizza oven, which aligns with the trend of outdoor kitchens, fire and water features and large-format pavers. For a more inviting environment, add accents like brick mailboxes, a paver walkway, new/improved front porch and landscape beds.

Choosing the right products for your specific project's needs also is essential and significantly impacts the overall finished look. "I have seen projects completed with either inferior products or the wrong product for the specific applications. Choosing the right product for your project can make it last a lifetime," he shares.

No matter the scope of your project, when beginning, Traynor highly recommends rigorous planning that includes meeting with a professional, researching trends in your neighborhood and accounting for time and maintenance.

MMP provides an extensive amount of guidance for clients every step of the way, including on-site displays, sample materials, installation guides, videos and seminars and local delivery along with reputable contractor, mason and/or landscape references.

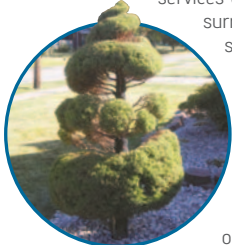
» 620 Willow St., Youngstown, 330-744-7587, masonrymaterialsplus.com



GREEN SOLUTIONS

Enhance your home's curb appeal by giving your lawn and landscaping a little more TLC this season.

FROM METICULOUS landscaping upgrades to simple projects, boosting your home's exterior this spring can make a world of difference. Michael Gibson, owner of Gibson Works LLC, services the Valley and surrounding areas, specializing in projects from tree and shrub maintenance to topiary design. If you're skeptical of the importance of curb appeal, Gibson explains, you may want to reconsider.



"Beautifying your landscape can help increase the value of the neighborhood and, in return, make it look safer," he says.

Before you get started, it's best to define a budget. "Having a budget in mind will help give you an idea of what you can start on first. You don't have to try to do everything at once if the funds won't allow. Divide projects up into phases," he says.

After defining a budget, Gibson recommends immediately consulting a professional for major improvements. "Call someone who knows what they are doing and has more experience. Not knowing what you are doing could lead to spending more money to fix what you couldn't," he says.

While everyone's budget may vary, some trends are vital to any project and not only add value, but save time and money. For example, maintaining your exterior by using rocks instead of mulch is a great way to improve landscape. It also makes maintenance easier and increases the longevity of your overall landscape design. "Rocks offer better drainage, as well as providing a more refreshing look to the property by preventing the majority of unwanted weeds from growing," Gibson says.

Another must-have, according to Gibson, is outdoor lighting, which adds scenic visuals to your property with little to no effort. "It's essential to showcasing your beautiful landscape even when the sun sets. Options range from energy-efficient, solar-powered to low-consumption electrical lights."

If you're not quite ready to commit to a lawn overhaul, don't worry. "Adding color with various perennials and annuals can be a quick fix. Mowing and edging the lawn can add an immediate enhancement to a property as well," Gibson reveals.

» 330-406-9360



MOVING CAN BE one of life's most stressful events. Dan Earley and his wife Stefanie are on a mission to change that. Their business, Earley & Sons Relocation LLC, offers assistance in moving, downsizing, organizing, packing, unpacking, handyman services and the set-up of a new home, among others. "We try and take as much of the stress out of the process for them," says Earley.

While their main focus is senior citizens, they are available for all ages. First, they will conduct a free home visit and determine the scope of work

FRESH START

MOVING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE SOMETHING YOU DREAD, THANKS TO EARLEY & SONS RELOCATION.

that needs to be done. They'll also take measurements of the items hoping to be moved, go into the new home and create a custom floor plan to fit everything. Full organizing and packing/unpacking can take two and a half weeks while a project focused on packing only can take just a few days.

Earley stresses the importance of downsizing long before a move. "Starting early is key, so you don't feel overwhelmed and make hasty decisions," he says. He suggests going through the home room by room and designating spaces to put items to keep, throw away and give to charity.

While moving can be a stressful time, having the right help can allow people to focus on the opportunity to go through items and memories of the past. Earley recalls helping one of his first clients, an elderly woman who had lived in her Boardman home for 40 years. "You could really see how appreciative she was of our services. We found things in her home from her husband who had died 10 years prior that she didn't know about and was glad to see," he says.

» 7100 Lockwood Blvd., PMB 313, Boardman, 330-501-7004, earleyandsons.com

CLEAN SLATE

A seasonal cleaning list is sure to keep you on schedule throughout the year.

WHILE "SPRING CLEANING" is discussed most often, Katie Burkey, owner of the sole Molly Maid franchise in the Mahoning Valley, explains that it is important to clean year-round. Molly Maid offers general cleaning services, pre- or post-party cleanups and post-pregnancy or disability assistance. The staff cleans all areas of the home, including ceilings, windows, woodwork, doors, doorframes and baseboards. Molly Maid completes large projects in a short timeframe, brings their own chemicals and supplies and specializes in cleaning the nooks and crannies the public typically cannot reach. "Being prepared and keeping a schedule helps you enjoy each season," says Burkey. Follow her tips on an ideal year-round cleaning schedule.

SPRING: "Spring is usually that time of the year where you go through clothes. A good rule of thumb is if you hadn't worn it in the last six months, you won't wear it again, except for cocktail dresses and other special-occasion items," Burkey says. During this time of year, wash the walls, go through childrens' toys and prep paperwork for tax season. Spring also is a good season to strip beds of blankets and pillows and vacuum the mattresses.

SUMMER: "Summer is typically the time to step outside," says Burkey. This includes going through the shed and garage and sprucing up outside furniture. Burkey recommends donating old rakes to local city or community efforts. On rainy summer days, rummage through pantries and throw out expired food.

FALL: Take advantage of the last warm days and shake out rugs

and doormats and change curtains. It's also the best season to focus on the bathrooms. Wash the shower curtain liners, soak showerhead nozzles in lemon juice and clean out the drains. "It's a gross job, but can be done in fall's crappy days," says Burkey.

WINTER: While trapped inside, take the time to go through spare closets to see what can be donated or downsized. Also, start thinking of

the impending holidays by reviewing baking supplies and preparing grocery lists if you'll be hosting. "Prep extra rooms like a bed-and-breakfast and put toiletries and linens in rooms, rather than in the bathroom, for guests," Burkey suggests.

» 4531 Belmont Ave., Suite 1, Youngstown, 330-793-9900, mollymaid.com/local-house-cleaning/oh/mahoning-trumbull-county.aspx





SPRING INTO GEAR

ROB STRUHARIK III OF MASTER PLAN HOMES SAYS SPRING IS THE IDEAL TIME TO JUMPSTART HOLIDAY PROJECTS.

HOME IS WHERE the heart, family and architectural design are. As the warmer months are inching closer, now is the prime time to build a home or add some new features to your abode. Master Plan Homes, which has been crafting homes since 1983, uses design and construction to keep home styles as fresh as this year's budding perennials.

"Spring is a great time to actually consider a project you may want completed for the holiday season," says Rob Struharik III, owner of Master Plan Homes. He says by planning projects far enough in advance, you avoid running into any major problems that could've been avoided. "Anything good seems to take some planning," Struharik says.

Struharik says Master Plan Homes uses architectural elements such as stone fireplaces and unique finishes on granite surfaces as the center of its home designs. "We take these larger architectural elements and create them as focal points rather than added pieces to the puzzle," he says. "We utilize main points of interest."

This year, expect to see plenty of distressed wood, stone accents and teak wood on display in new home builds. "The distressed look and the reclaimed look is becoming huge," says Struharik. Adding these kinds of elements to a contemporary home softens the feel of the home.

Although design and structure are key parts of homebuilding, Struharik says, one of the most essential facets in building a home is hiring people you trust. "The largest service we offer is trust and value," he says. "We're small enough to give people personal service, but large enough to have a kitchen and cabinet designer who only focuses on that, an art marketing director who only focuses on his specialty. We zero in on expertise."

» 11624 South Ave., North Lima, 330-549-0692, masterplanhomes.com



GET THE LOOK

Custom draperies and window treatments can set the tone for your entire house.

THERESE PITZULO LIKES to compare herself and her business, the Workroom, to Santa's workshop. Bringing 25 years of alteration experience to the table, Pitzulo now creates custom draperies and window treatments for both residential and commercial interior designers. Home and business owners alike will work with designers on the layout they want for their windows. Pitzulo then comes in as the resource for designers on fabric knowledge and creates the draperies and treatments. "I'm like the hidden elf that makes things for people that no one really knows about," she says.

In addition, the Workroom creates bedding, pillows, cushions and other soft treatments.

With her expansive industry knowledge, Pitzulo discusses recent trends in window treatments. The industry standard is moving toward cordless treatments: soon cords will no longer be available.

Motorized and automated shading also has gained popularity. "People are away from home more than ever now and, while they are away, they can rotate shading and lights to make it seem like they are still home, which is great for security," she says.

PITZULO OFFERS A FEW THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN DECIDING ON WINDOW TREATMENTS:

» "There is no comparison between having an experienced interior designer and custom draperies versus what you would buy in a home improvement store," says Pitzulo. Custom drapes are more substantial, have comparable lengths and hang straighter.

» Don't just think about how drapes fit in the interior of a home. "Consider curb appeal. Remember your house has a view from the outside to consider, not just the inside," she says.

» Take into account the lifestyle and ages of those living in the home. People who work swing shifts might look into room-darkening effects with their designer as that would be beneficial to block out the sun as they sleep. Also, "long draperies may not be right for you if you have children or pets," Pitzulo explains.

» "[To] guard against expensive fabric fading from the sun, the designer can also help you with proper lining of draperies and if you need shades," she shares.

» 330-718-2409, theworkroomohio.com



AMAZING SPACES

DECORATING IS MADE EASY WITH PRO TIPS FROM JACKIE MOTSINGER, OWNER OF JACKIE M INTERIOR DESIGNS.



ACCORDING TO JACKIE Motsinger, owner of Jackie M Interior Designs, this spring is all about vibrant colors. If you're looking to add dimension to any room, bright-colored silk and wool rugs are trending and will do the trick. "Bright colors in silk and wool rugs are a popular dramatic addition to either bare floors or over a flat-weave carpet. You will find them in vibrant and dramatic colors with tone-on-tone florals and damasks in colors like turquoise, emerald green, chartreuse, navy blue, black and variations of soft to bright pink," Motsinger says.

For added depth, another emerging trend is silk floral arrangements, which look like they're in fresh water, floral-print pillows and beautiful bouquets of spring florals like tulips, dogwoods, daisies, crab apples and cherry blossoms.

With regard to planning, Motsinger says, ho-

meowners should consider the light, color, scale, flow, layout, temperament and that versatility they'd like their homes to have. "Mistakes are often made in the scale of furniture in a small or low-ceilinged room. Paint, floor, counter and wood color and light, artificial or natural, will dramatically affect how the room is perceived and what emotions are evoked," she notes.

When considering a budget, contrary to popular belief, interior designers aren't exclusively for the wealthy and affluent, and most homeowners may be surprised to learn how much money and time they'll save by opting for an experienced professional. "An interior designer can help prevent mistakes that could cost you thousands of dollars or years of discomfort and dissatisfaction. Five hours with an interior designer might cost you \$500 to \$625, but might also prevent wasting thousands of dollars," she says.

If you're looking for less of a commitment and still want to add a new look to your home this spring, Motsinger suggests, when in doubt, it's best to declutter and neutralize a room, using a fresh coat of paint or wallpaper and/or adding new accents to existing furniture. "Change your floral arrangements to the newer water garden look. Slipcover that old wing chair. New shades and shorter harps can update those old lamps."

» 4845 Market St., Boardman, 330-774-9224, jackieminteriors.com



ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Create the home of your dreams with expert design tips.

IT'S NO SECRET how challenging designing a home can be, but local designer Caron Hutch has the expertise to keep your fears and frustrations at bay. With nearly 40 years in the industry, she can help design the home you've always desired. Hutch's design firm, Caron Hutch Interior Design in Youngstown, provides full design services from new home construction specifications to redecorating a small room.

Hutch says one of the most frequent design challenges her clients face is the lack of natural light, which usually stems from a house's infrastructure. "Lack of natural light is always a big problem because the cause is usually the way the house is positioned on the lot, or the lot has an abundance of trees."

A solution for this challenge is working closely with an architect and builder prior to construction of the home. "The best way to avoid this problem is for the homeowner, architect and builder to study which rooms receive the most light before construction begins," she says.

Another possible solution for homeowners, who may not have access to architects and/or builders, is working closely with a designer and defining their design style that reflects what they love.

Though some homeowners may be apprehensive about collaborating with a designer out of fear of compromising their vision, Hutch explains this misconception actually hinders clients and prolongs the process. "Designers are on the cutting-edge of all new home-design products, many of which most homeowners would not even know exist. My 38 years of experience has shown a professional designer usually saves the client money by knowing where to purchase to get the best pricing and by avoiding costly design mistakes," she says.

» 75 Jennette Drive, Boardman, 330-502-3399

BURNING PASSION

Add a rustic touch to your home with a custom wood-burned piece from Taylor Wood Burning.

A UNIQUE GIFT for his South Range High School sweetheart and now wife, Katie, turned into a life-long passion for Jordan Taylor. He burned four roses, one in each corner, connected by thorn and stems, onto a wooden picture frame for her and has been self-teaching and practicing the art of pyrography, or wood burning, ever since.

Now the Struthers resident sells his work through his business, Taylor Wood Burning. He takes custom orders online and sells items at The Shop on Liberty Street in Hubbard.

"I'm able to burn pretty much anything on wood," Taylor shares. "So I really just use my creativity to try to come up with stuff that I think will be enjoyed by people in their home, and I try to keep it in a reasonable price range for people so that they can easily enjoy it."

Taylor typically creates outdoor scenes, drawing from his love of nature. A forest theme also translates well on a piece of oak or cherry tree, all of which he sources from land in the Valley.

"I don't use a template," he says. "I want every piece that I do to be unique, whether it be unique to someone who picks up a piece at The Shop or unique to the person who says they want a sign [custom-made]."

The art form is much like tattooing on wood. "There's a tool that's very similar looking to a pen," Taylor explains.

Signs, ornaments and cutting boards are the main products Taylor sells at The Shop. Cherry wood cutting boards (\$30 to \$40) are sealed with food-safe oil and wax. Signs (\$25 at The Shop, more for custom orders) are sealed with a clear-coat acrylic so that the pieces are well preserved.

Taylor Wood Burning isn't Taylor's full-time job. He's also a pastor for Family Life Ministries at Victory Christian Center. But he's putting the money from his wood-burning sales into an adoption fund so he and Katie can start a family.

"Just being able to know that my family's values, like our love for nature or beautiful landscapes, that I can put that on something and touch another family that way [when they put a piece in their home] is so cool."

» facebook.com/taylorwoodburning

