

The background of the cover is a photograph of a light-colored wooden console table with decorative carvings. On top of the table are several decorative items: a yellow birdhouse, a white candle, a white planter with green grass, a small green figurine, a lit candle, a yellow mug with green grass, a white candle, a green vase with white flowers, and a green apple. In front of the table is a large, round, woven basket filled with a bouquet of yellow and white flowers. The overall aesthetic is bright and fresh, typical of spring home decor.

Spring

HOME

IMPROVEMENT 3

- **A guide to survive lengthy home renovations**
- **Remedies for common electrical problems**
- **3 ways to get more use out of a garage**







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How to organize a home's interior

The dawn of a new year marks a convenient time to turn over a new leaf. Much attention is paid to individuals' intentions to eat healthier and exercise more at the start of a new year, but those goals are not the only ways to embrace positive change come January. A quick look around a home's interior may lead some to conclude that their home environments could benefit from a little less clutter and some improved organization. A more organized home may be easier to navigate and can even have a positive impact on residents' mental health. In fact, a 2021 study published in the journal *Comprehensive Psychoneuroendocrinology* found that women who cared for infants in cluttered homes experienced higher levels of physical stress than those whose homes were more organized. That study suggests an organized home is a less stressful environment, which itself can pay numerous dividends, as the Mayo Clinic notes chronic stress increases a person's risk for various health problems, including anxiety, depression, digestive issues, heart disease, and weight gain, among others. With so much to gain from an organized home, individuals can consider these strategies to make interior spaces around the house less cluttered.

- Avoid procrastinating. A weekly, if not daily, routine that involves cleaning up spaces like the kitchen and living room can ensure a home is not overtaken by clutter before residents even realize it. Each day, go through the mail and discard papers like grocery store circulars and junk mail so they don't pile up. Parents of school-aged children can organize papers kids return home with each day so all that homework and event announcements does not create clutter.



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- Purchase an entryway shoe rack. It might seem simple, but an entryway shoe rack can set an organized tone in a home. Whether the primary entryway is through the front door or a side door, a shoe rack just inside the door can ensure shoes are not strewn about and reduces the chances that floors are muddied.
- Consider furniture that doubles as storage. Many people utilize storage furniture so common spaces like living rooms are not overwhelmed by clutter. For example, a storage ottoman can hold blankets, pillows and other creature comforts so these rooms project a clutter-free vibe when not in use. Similarly, storage benches at the end of beds in each bedroom can help to establish a serene, clutter-free vibe, which can promote a better night's sleep.
- Discard older items. Clutter can pile up when storage areas like closets, dressers, nightstands, and home offices fill up with items people tend to accumulate over the years. For example, a linen closet can be overrun by bath towels that are rarely used, while nightstands can become junk drawers over the years. Periodically go through these areas and discard older items that are no longer used. These tasks won't take long, but can free up ample space throughout the home. These are just a handful of the many ways individuals can effectively organize their home interiors and reap all the rewards that such efforts produce. TF251554

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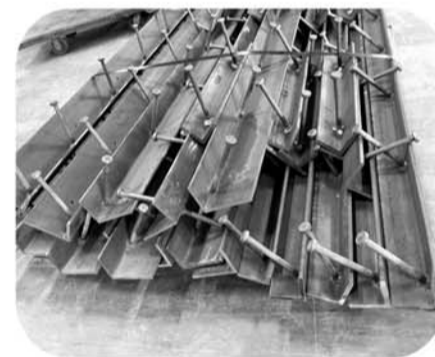
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3 ways to get more use out of a garage

Even though no two homes are the same, rooms have a tendency to take on similar characteristics regardless of which property they're a part of. Kitchens tend to be popular gathering spaces, while basements have

Lifting storage racks work in similar fashion and make for great additions for anyone who needs to store containers full of seasonal decor but does not want to do so by stacking items on the floor.

become go-to spots for game rooms and watch parties.

Garages also tend to share certain characteristics between homes, and one notable attribute is the tendency to become difficult-to-navigate dumping grounds for a wide range of items, including lawn and garden tools, children's toys, sporting goods, and seasonal home decor. Though there's nothing wrong with utilizing a garage as a storage space, the following are three simple ways homeowners can get more out of these spaces.

1. Utilize the wall space. The walls in a garage have lots of potential. Effective use of walls within a garage can ensure garden tools, small toys and other items do not accumulate on the floor. Such accumulations contribute much to the reputation of garages as dumping grounds for miscellaneous items. By clearing the floors of clutter, and utilizing wall spaces to store items, homeowners can open up the spaces to serve any number of functions, including home gyms, art studios or even parking spaces to protect vehicles from the elements. A storage



organizer system with various hooks can be mounted on a garage wall to free up floor space, while shelving can be hung to store paint cans, power tool batteries and other items.

2. Look upward. If garage ceilings extend several feet above the height of homeowners' vehicles, then the spaces above where cars might be parked can be converted into storage space for large recreational items, like canoes or kayaks, or seasonal decor that does not need to be accessed on a regular basis. A simple kayak hoist utilizing a pulley system clears floor space and allows kayaks to be stored overhead. Lifting storage racks work in similar fashion and make for great additions for anyone who needs to store containers full of seasonal decor but does not want to do so by stacking items on the floor. A hand crank system for a lifting storage rack makes for easy and safe access.

3. Install new lighting. Without ample lighting, garages may not be conducive to recreational pursuits like painting, crafting or even exercising. A lighting upgrade is a relatively affordable renovation that can make a big difference, illuminating spaces not exactly known for brightness, especially if there's no windows. If you want to spend time in the garage during winter and stay warm, then some new lighting can make that possible.

Homeowners whose garages are currently serving as cluttered storage closets can do much to get more out of these useful spaces. SH262611



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THE 411 ON WHOLE-HOUSE GENERATORS

Weather is unpredictable. Strong winds or storms can wreak havoc on power lines, resulting in outages that may last hours or even days. People have come to rely on electricity, not only for comfort and safety, but to power just about every aspect of modern life. A power outage can be a minor disruption or downright dangerous, unless a whole-house generator can take over when needed.

Most units will test themselves periodically for a few minutes each week to recharge the batteries and keep the engine lubricated, which serves as a testament to the hands-off nature of these systems.

What is a whole-house generator?

A whole-house generator, also called a standby generator, is a permanently installed system that provides backup power to a home during a utility outage. The generator typically runs using a natural gas or propane connection. Unlike a portable generator, a whole-house generator is installed outside on a concrete slab. It is wired to the home's electrical panel through an automatic

transfer switch (ATS). This switch will continuously monitor the electrical grid's power and start automatically if an outage is detected. When the power comes back on, the ATS will shut off the generator and reconnect the home to the grid.

Generator considerations

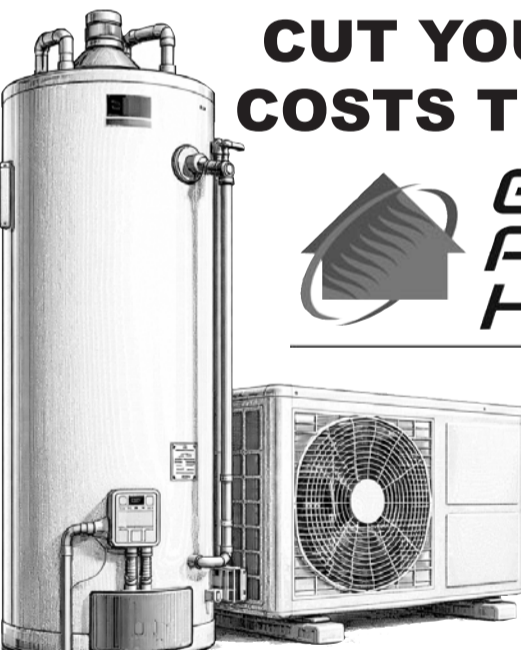
NJR Home Services says there are some considerations when determining which generator best meets the needs of a household. It's important to identify where power will be needed in the home, whether it's a few essential pieces of equipment or the entire home. The more




one wants to have powered, the more costly the generator will be. The location of the generator on the property must meet local zoning requirements, which vary from town to town. A permit likely will be required for the installation work. Another consideration is gas meter sizing. A trained technician should schedule a pressure check to ensure that the gas supply to the home can handle the new generator.

What if there hasn't been an outage?

Most units will test themselves periodically for a few minutes each week to recharge the batteries and keep the engine lubricated, which serves as a testament to the hands-off nature of these systems. Whole-house generators offer peace of mind in an unpredictable world. When the power goes out, these generators seamlessly kick into action. SH262609



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How to establish a home renovation budget

Homeowners know that the next home renovation project is always right around the corner. And that means finding ways to finance such undertakings.

When planning for renovations, the average homeowner underestimates their project cost by approximately 22 percent, according to the 2026 Remodeling Impact Report. Establishing a pre-project budget can help avoid such surprises.

Don't over-improve

A common mistake homeowners make is over-improving a home beyond the neighborhood value. A good rule of thumb is to employ the average percentage-of-home-value approach in an effort to stay within range of what's acceptable. Budget a kitchen renovation or finished basement at 10 to 15 percent of the home value. A master bedroom will come in at 5 to 10 percent of home value, while a small bedroom or office falls between 1 and 3 percent of home value. These benchmarks are supported by the National Association of the Remodeling Industry and the National Association of Realtors. Historically, a functional, modern kitchen is the top driver of home value, says Remodeling Magazine.

Learn the breakdown

Homeowners should understand that materials, fixtures, appliances, and flooring, otherwise known as "hard costs," will eat up 50 to 60 percent of their renovation budgets. Labor, permits and design fees will comprise the next largest chunk, typically coming in between 25

and 35 percent. Homeowners also should factor about 15 to 20 percent of a budget to a safety net to cover unforeseen expenses, like mold remediation or structural issues.

Get three quotes

It's important for homeowners to get several estimates before establishing a budget. Experts advise working with contractors that offer fixed-price contracts rather than those that list time and materials; otherwise, there may be a mid-project price hike that comes out of the blue. A person also can ask contractors for a line-item bid so it's possible to see where money can be trimmed through different material choices. With a list of desired items in hand, and acceptable substitutions if the cost comes in too high, homeowners can create a budget that works.

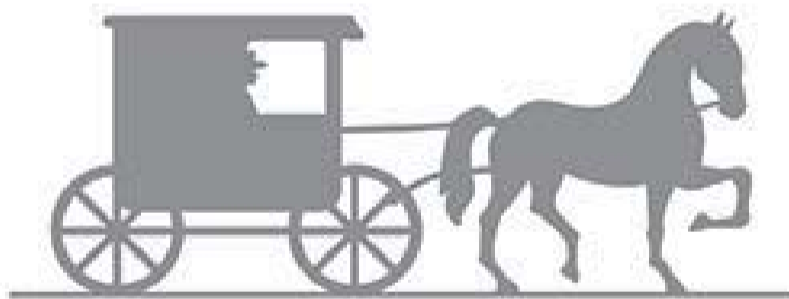
Saving versus splurging

It's important for homeowners to be realistic about their renovations. They can splurge on items that are seen or touched every day, like door handles, cabinet pulls and faucets. Other items, like lighting fixtures or backsplashes, can be replaced down the road. It may be better to direct funds to structural elements or those "invisible renovations" like upgrading insulation or smart systems that save on energy costs and improve efficiency.

Keep a 20 percent cushion

Homeowners can determine the affordability if a proposed project ends up costing 20 percent more or takes a few months longer. If the answer is no, homeowners should scale back the project budget until they have that financial safety net. Alliant Credit Union says experts strongly recommend adding a 20 percent contingency cushion to a remodeling budget.

A home remodeling project is a big commitment of time and money. Budgeting correctly ensures that there are few, if any, surprises along the way. EL265819



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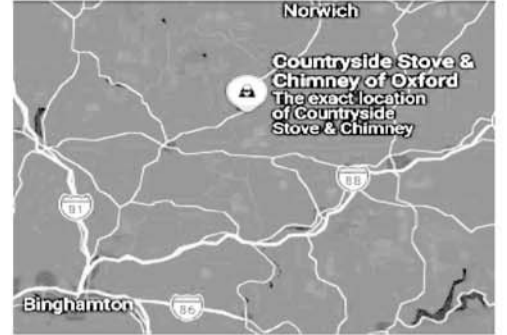
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Tips to take care of wood flooring

Natural wood flooring is a stunning feature of millions of homes. Wood floors are appreciated for their durability and aesthetic appeal, each of which is bolstered when floors are properly maintained.

A host of variables can affect how long wood flooring lasts and how its appearance holds up over time. Wood flooring in homes with pets that roam around the house, such as cats and dogs, may require more frequent maintenance than those without pets. The same goes for homes with children, who may routinely track dirt in from outside or spill food and drinks with greater frequency than adults. But even wood flooring in homes without pets and children requires consistent maintenance. Homeowners who want to protect their wood floors and ensure they maintain their aesthetic appeal for the long haul can consider the following maintenance tips, courtesy of the National Wood Flooring Association.

- Sweep, dust or mop each day. The NWFA recommends daily maintenance to remove dust and dirt that accumulates each day. Such cleaning can prevent damage that can compromise the aesthetic appeal of the floors and potentially affect their longevity.
- Clean spills immediately. Spills are inevitable, especially in homes where young children live. Though spills might not be preventable, the damage they can cause can be avoided with a prompt response. Cleaning spills immediately with a dry or slightly damp cloth can ensure the floors do not soak up the spilled liquids. The NWFA notes that mopping wood floors with a wet mop or steam mop will damage the finish and the wood over long periods of time. If allowed to soak into the floor, spilled liquid can contribute to warping, swelling and staining. Each of those issues can be costly to address, but a quick and immediate cleanup can prevent all three from happening.
- Vacuum once per week on the bare floor setting. Utilizing a vacuum is less taxing on wood floors than sweeping so long as the vacuum is on

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the bare floor setting. Sweeping is best avoided to prevent small particles from being dragged across the floor, which gradually wears down the finish and ultimately contributes to a dull look. Vacuuming vertically lifts the debris off the floor, ensuring nothing is dragged along the surface of the floor. If you're using a manual vacuum instead of a robotic vacuum, vacuum with the grain to reduce the risk of damage.

- Apply wood flooring cleaner once per month. If your wood floors are newly installed, ask your installer to recommend a cleaner specifically designed for the finish on your floor. If your floors are not new, contact a flooring professional for a recommendation. Wood flooring cleaners specific to a given floor's finish are important because these products are specialized and formulated with both cleaning and protection of the floor itself in mind. The right wood floor cleaner won't lead to dull-looking floors nor damage the finish.

- Recoat floors if they start to look dull. The NWFA notes that recoating with wood floor finish every three to five years can renew the appearance of natural wood flooring that might be starting to look a little dull.

Well-maintained wood floors add much to a home's interiors. Some simple maintenance can ensure wood floors remain durable and aesthetically appealing for decades. HI264733

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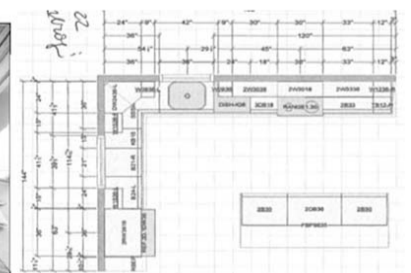
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Remedies for common electrical problems

Electricity is a modern convenience that's easily taken for granted until homes are plunged into darkness during power outages. Thomas Edison introduced electricity to the world in the late nineteenth century. After Edison's home received a private electric system, the first American home to be powered by hydroelectricity was in Appleton, Wisconsin in 1882. Despite that, just 50 percent all homes in the United States had electricity by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Electricity is now a standard home feature. And when something goes awry with a home's electrical components, homeowners may need to act fast to restore things to proper working order. Certain electrical problems are common in residential homes. Even homeowners with do-it-yourself skills should bring in an experienced electrician when their homes develop electrical problems, as electricity is nothing for novices to play with. Here's what to look for and how to remedy common issues, courtesy of East-West Electric, Inc., Safe and Sound Electric LLC, and American Home Shield.

- **Flickering lights:** Flickering lights merit attention. While lights can flicker when bulbs are not screwed in tightly, this also could be a sign of a faulty connection that is creating arcing and overheating. A failure to address flickering lights might lead to a fire. An electrician can inspect wiring and fixtures to see where the problem may lie, and replace any necessary components.
- **Degraded electrical wiring:** Older homes may have aging electrical wiring that is worn out in places. This can cause arc faults, which occur when an electrical current veers off its intended path. Arc faults can cause electrical fires. Installing arc-fault circuit interrupters on the circuit panel can help. Traditional circuit breakers only trip with overloads and short circuits. AFCIs continuously monitor flow and will

only trip during unwanted arcing conditions.

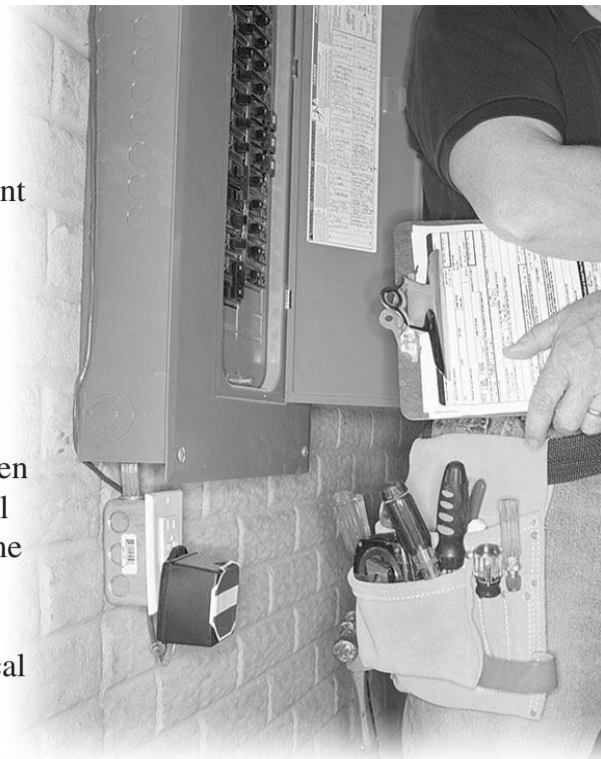
- **Insufficient power:** Those who reside in older homes might experience insufficient electrical power. Electrical grids homes are built using the technology of that time and may not be capable of handling the many devices that homeowners plug in today. Circuits may trip often when one or more electrical devices are used on the same circuit. The only way to remedy this issue is to replace the existing electrical system with a restructured one that can handle the supply of power.

- **Buzzing sounds:** Electrical outlets and switches in a home should always operate silently. Buzzing or unusual sounds heard near switches and outlets indicates there is a problem. Turn off the power to that fixture and consult a professional electrician to see what might be the issue.

- **Warmth around light fixtures:** Hot ceiling lights or other lights could mean that a homeowner is exceeding the recommended bulb wattages for that fixture. Check the bulbs, and consider switching to compact fluorescent or LED bulbs that do not produce as much heat as incandescent bulbs.

- **Higher energy bills:** Energy bills can spike for a number of reasons. Outdated electrical devices that draw a lot of power or a leakage in the system are two potential causes of higher energy bills. Homeowners can call an electrician to assess the energy efficiency of a home and suggest changes.

Electrical problems might be common, but they should be dealt with promptly for safety's sake. SH252606



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Upgrades to ensure a home stays safe and secure

A home can never be too safe or secure. When residents of a home leave or go to bed at night, a wide range of safety and security features can protect them and their belongings. In-home amenities also can make homes safer for residents with mobility issues or other limitations. Homeowners indeed have no shortage of options when seeking to make their homes safer and more secure. An assortment of safety and security features can help homeowners plan for nearly every situation that could put residents in jeopardy.

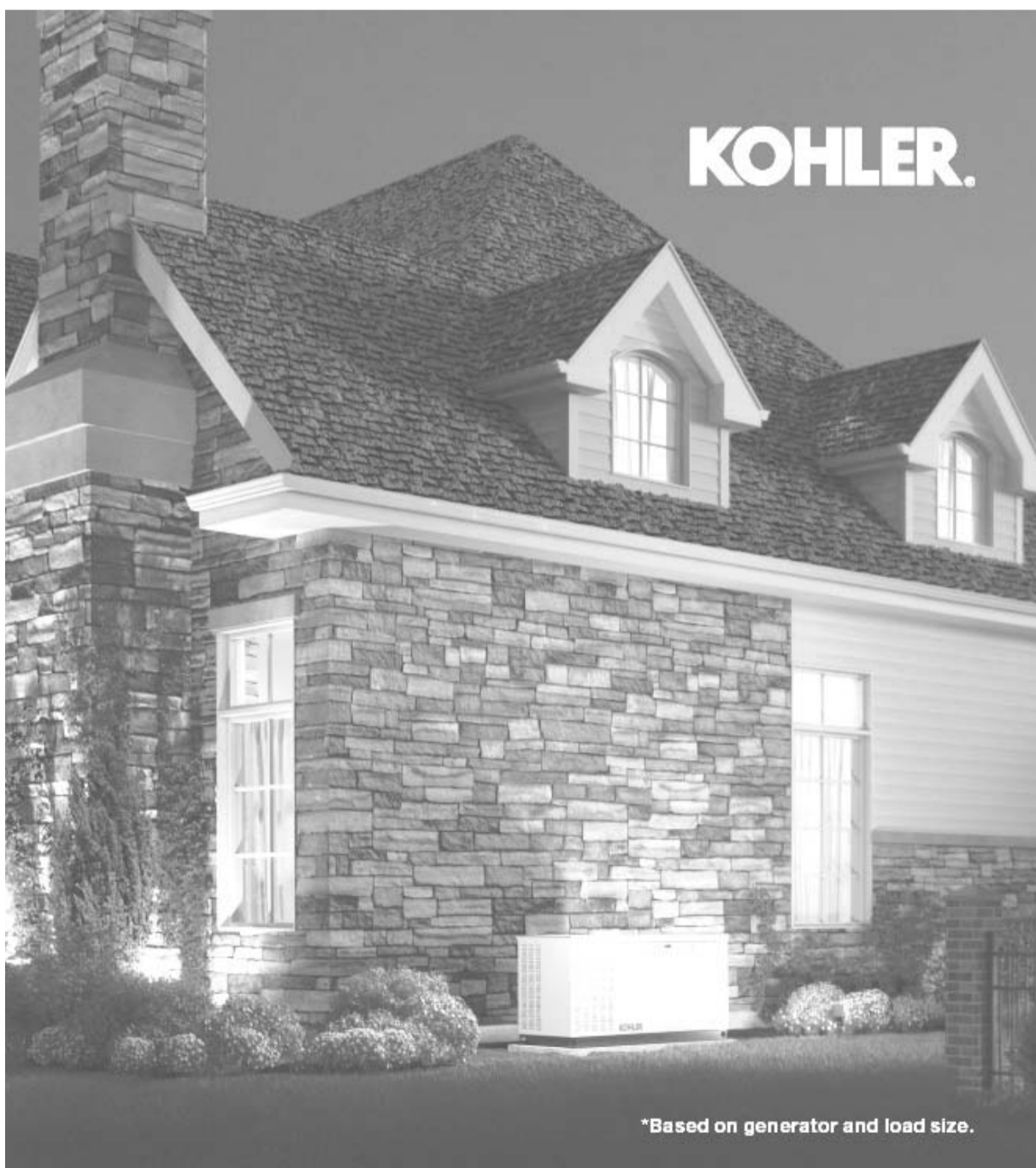
• **Age-related safety features:** Various features can help seniors age in place. The National Institute on Aging recommends installing grab bars in showers and bathtubs to reduce the risk of falls when bathing. Such features also can help seniors balance themselves while they bathe and get in and out of showers and tubs. Nonslip strips can be installed on bathroom and kitchen floors in areas that might be vulnerable to spills or puddling. The NIA also recommends fixing all carpets firmly on the floors, which may necessitate the removal of all area rugs. Adding handrails on staircases so there's something to grab onto on each side the staircase also can enhance the safety of these potentially risky spaces in a home.

• **Entry point security features:** Deadbolts, security cameras and/or smart doorbells make it easier to keep strangers out and monitor entryways. Smart doorbells may deter criminals from approaching a property. Locks and sensors also can be installed on all windows, and especially those on the first floor that can be accessed from the ground. Locks on sliding doors can be reinforced with secondary locks that further prevent the door from being opened from the outside once the locks are engaged.



• **Fire safety features:** The National Fire Protection Association notes that the death rate in home structure fires is approximately 60 percent lower in homes with working smoke alarms than in homes with no alarms or in homes where alarms are not working. The NFPA adds that smoke alarms monitor for smoke and control the speaker that emits the sounds that notify occupants of the presence of smoke. The NFPA recommends both ionization smoke alarms and photoelectric smoke alarms, as each employs a different type of sensor. The combination of both in a home ensures people are alerted in the case of both flaming fires (ionization alarms) and smoking, smoldering fires (photoelectric alarms). A functioning fire extinguisher also is a must (disposable extinguishers typically last between 10 and 12 years), as is a carbon monoxide detector.

• **Lighting:** Sufficient lighting in a home and around the exterior of a home and even the property can be another important safety and security measure. Exterior lighting deters intruders because it makes them more visible to residents while they're awake and makes them easier to see on overnight security cameras, which can be enough to keep them away. Interior lighting makes it easier to navigate a home at twilight and at night. Hallway night lights can make trips to the bathroom safer, and lighting alongside stairways can make these spaces easier to navigate when the rest of the home is dark. There's no shortage of ways to make homes safer and more secure, which should be a priority for homeowners of all ages. TF265834



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A guide to survive lengthy home renovations

Renovations can transform homes into spaces that mirror homeowners' dreams. Regardless of the scope of a project, a home renovation will involve some level of disruption to residents' daily lives. Lengthy, more involved projects may impact daily life considerably.

Renovation timelines vary depending on the scale of the project. Painting may take a week or two, while a kitchen or bathroom remodel may last anywhere from four to 16 weeks. Larger projects like adding a room can take between three and six months, say the experts at John Merrill Homes. Projects also often take longer than expected, as surprises may be in store once homeowners begin peeling back the layers in homes. Homeowners about to embark on lengthy renovation projects can embrace these tips to come through on the other side relatively unscathed.

Choose your timing

The timing of a renovation may have to coincide with contractor availability or having the budget to fund the project. But homeowners should consider life circumstances and season before starting a project. You might not have the energy to take on a project right before the holidays. If kids play on sports teams that require a lot of travel, it might be better to wait until the season winds down. Figure out what you can realistically take on to reduce the likelihood that you'll feel overwhelmed.

Plan accordingly

Creating and sticking to a daily schedule, and knowing what is



happening each day, can keep a project on track. It also allows you to determine which days will be the most chaotic. Demolition days can be noisy and messy, and maybe those are days when you plan to be away from the house for a few hours.

Store items out of harm's way

Invest in a storage solution for the duration of the renovation. Decluttering and removing items before the project is in full force will make it easier to work and maneuver, and it also means fewer items will need to be cleaned afterwards. Renovations tend to kick up a lot of construction dust, after all.

Designate a safe zone

Establish a room or rooms as work-free areas to which residents can retreat. If multiple rooms are being renovated, you might consider spending time with a family member or friend, or getting a hotel for a short duration until the bulk of disruption dies down.

Lower your standards

Homecooked meals may be your standard most days of the week, but it's alright to be a bit lax when remodeling projects begin. Relying on frozen foods or takeout might be necessary for a little while. Remodeling projects can be disruptive and stressful, but certain strategies can make it easier to get through projects without too much disruption. SH262606



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