

(201) HOME

SPRING 2013

INNOVATIVE SHOWROOM

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OUTDOOR ENTERTAINING SPACES

DO-IT-YOURSELF PROJECTS

TRENDY TOWNHOUSES

THE POWER OF YOUR FRONT DOOR



A SUPPLEMENT TO (201) MAGAZINE

91124542346

Opening Doors

Adding character to your home with your front door

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Just as the eyes are said to be the windows to the soul, when it comes to your home, your front door can say a lot about the people who live inside. Although home renovations typically revolve around kitchens or bathrooms, upgrading your exterior door can be a quick, cost-effective way to add character to your home.

"Upgrading your front door can instantly improve your curb appeal and make your home more energy-efficient," Stephen Huebner, president and owner of North Jersey Door Center in Ramsey, says. "Unlike installing a new sprinkler system or renovating your kitchen, changing your entry door changes the entire first impression of your home – and we all know that first impressions are everything."

THE POWER OF A FRONT DOOR

According to Matthew D. Kuiken, vice president of operations for Kuiken Brothers Company Inc., a family-owned and -operated building supplies company with various locations in Bergen County, there's no question that a newer, more energy-efficient and architecturally correct entranceway can improve the value of a home.

"Like a new kitchen," he says, "the entranceway is an impactful element for potential home buyers. It's the perfect home improvement project because after all your selections are made, installing a beautiful front door can be a one-day capital improvement that provides a 100-percent return on your investment."

However, even if you're not planning on selling your home any time in the near future, upgrading to a new door can come with a lot of other benefits, not the least of which is improving the energy efficiency of your home.

"In Bergen County, we have many uninsulated, aging homes with poorly sealed doors and single-pane windows," Kuiken says. "Tightening up the envelope of the home will go a long way in improving its overall level of energy efficiency."

GO OUT IN STYLE: DETERMINE YOUR ARCHITECTURE

Once you decide to change or upgrade your current exterior door, many homeowners will likely feel overwhelmed by the wealth of available choices. There are countless options to choose from on just about every facet of the door, such as various wood species and grain options, synthetic surfaces, panel designs and glass – and then there's the hardware, including handle set, hinges, sill, grommets and knockers.

"There's no shortage of options when it comes to designs," Kuiken says. "The entranceway to a home is a special element, and it should be unique."

Among the first considerations to make is the architectural style of your home. In Bergen County, for example, Kuiken says some of the more common architectural themes include traditional colonial, Dutch colonial, Craftsman and Tudor, in addition to homes with more contemporary architecture.

"As the focal point of the home," he says, "the entranceway should align with all the other stylistic elements of the exterior façade."

Homeowners can then start considering door patterns, which include various glass styles and patterns, panel designs and molding – sleek lines



might coincide best with contemporary houses, while ornate carvings are more at home on Victorian-era residences.

In recent years, Huebner says, among the most popular designs for doors are Craftsman, defined by straight lines, square molding, and geometric cube designs.

"A lot of homeowners are looking to bring their house up-to-date," he says, "and sometimes it's as easy as changing your front door."

KNOCK ON WOOD: CHOOSE YOUR MATERIAL

The most common materials for entry doors are wood, steel and fiberglass, and each type of material can provide different benefits, such as how it will react to the weather (if it's not protected by a porch or overhang).

A well-constructed and properly installed wood door unit will be fully sealed and weatherproof – and its natural properties help provide insulation for the home. But when exposed to the elements, wood can expand and contract due to extreme temperatures and varying moisture levels. However, if your heart is set on wood, in addition to being able to stain or paint the doors, a process known as torrefaction can treat wood to enhance its dimensional stability.

"This has become a popular option for those purists who wish to stay with wood but still have that extra stability," Kuiken says.

For homeowners who are trying to keep up with the latest trends in home design, Huebner says composite materials are becoming increasingly more popular than traditional wood doors.

"Whether you're spending \$500 or \$8,000 on your front door," he says, "you don't want to deal with cracks and warping. And you can minimize that risk with composite doors."

The popularity of fiberglass may also be due to the fact that it can offer an increased level of energy efficiency and a longer lifespan – and, as a bonus, the material is also paintable and stainable, and resistant to shrinking and swelling.

"Technology has come a long way, even in recent years," Kuiken says, "and I would challenge even the most discerning eye to pick out a finished fiberglass door from a real wood door."

Steel is also one of the preferred materials for entry doors, mainly due to the heightened levels of privacy and security they can provide. However, high-end fiberglass doors are still a more popular option; fiberglass doors are equally strong but have more design options and are less susceptible to rust or denting.

There are also, of course, cost differences to consider, but that can depend more on the specific elements of the door and the installation, Huebner says.

While a basic front entry door can cost as little as \$100 to \$300, expect installation to add as much as a few hundred dollars. More decorative options can run anywhere from \$200 to \$2,000 or more before installation, while the cost for deluxe doors (such as double doors, or those with intricate patterns) can run several thousand dollars.

"When it comes to choosing a front door," Huebner says, "it really all boils down to what you're looking for, what kind of house you have, and what you want to spend." >