

Compliments of Isdelmi "Ide" Acosta

Good to Be HOME

issue 33

teaching the tools
**OF THE
RENOVATION
TRADE**



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**SCAN TO SEE
YOUR CURRENT
HOME
ESTIMATE!**





As the days get longer and brighter, you may feel a renewed sense of inspiration to refresh and reimagine the spaces that shape daily life. This issue of Good to Be Home celebrates this creativity, offering ideas that can help every corner of your home feel more intentional, comfortable, and alive with possibility.

Designer Azali Kassum's thoughtful renovation of her 1790s Georgetown residence demonstrates how history and modern design can coexist in harmony. Her eight-year transformation honors the home's original charm while infusing it with contemporary elegance, a master class in balancing old and new.

For readers looking to elevate their own spaces, renovation experts Dennis and Teresa Walsh provide smart strategies that can enhance both beauty and value. Inside, Dennis explains how their educational online courses can empower homeowners to make confident updates.

Seasonal maintenance takes center stage in several enclosed features, including practical tips for boosting energy efficiency, preventing pests, and creating a stress-free garden. These handy upgrades make it easy to prepare for the warmer months while keeping your home both stylish and functional.

No matter the scale of the project, this issue encourages you to embrace change with imagination and care. As always, it's a pleasure to send you this magazine.

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INGREDIENTS:

- 2 (8-oz.) packages cream cheese, at room temperature
- $\frac{1}{2}$ c. granulated sugar
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 2 large eggs
- 1 c. milk
- 10 slices French bread, $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick (preferably homemade or fresh store-bought)
- 2 c. fresh blueberries
- Maple syrup, for serving
- Confectioners' sugar, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS:

1/ Preheat the oven to 350°F, and lightly grease a 9-by-13-in. baking dish.

2/ Beat the cream cheese, granulated sugar, vanilla, and cinnamon in a large bowl, with a stand mixer on medium speed, until well blended.

3/ Add the eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Add the milk, and mix well.

4/ Arrange the bread in the prepared baking dish, and spread the blueberries on top of the bread. Pour the cream cheese mixture over the bread. Let stand for at least 15 minutes before baking (or cover the pan, and place it in the refrigerator overnight). Bake for 40–45 minutes, until golden brown.

5/ Serve with maple syrup and confectioners' sugar.

Serves 5–6

Recipe excerpted from *Cider Beans, Wild Greens, and Dandelion Jelly* by Joan E. Allen (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2010). Food photography by Ben Fink.



TABLE OF Contents

ISSUE 33

02

Simple Pest-
Prevention Tips

04

Savvy
Gardening Hacks

10

A Georgetown
Home Reimagined

18

A Taste of the
Hamptons

26

How to
Blend Different
Design Styles

32

Seven Essential
Home Energy
Upgrades

38

Extreme
Weather Home-
Prep Tips

42

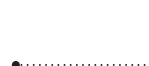
Teaching the
Tools of the
Renovation Trade

48

How to Reuse
Rubber Bands

SEE PAGE 10

*to step inside this renovated
1790s Georgetown home*



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HOME IMPROVEMENT



SIMPLE
Pest-Prevention Tips

written by ALLISON GOMES

Bugs are a fact of life, but they don’t have to be part of your living space. With the right prevention strategies, you can stop them before they become a problem and avoid the frustration of dealing with a full-blown infestation.

Identify the culprit

The first step is figuring out what you’re dealing with. Set an indoor trap near where you’ve found the pests, and take a clear photo when you’ve captured one. Use a tool like Google Lens or your phone’s photos app to help identify it. Once you know what you’re up against, you can address what’s attracting them, such as a porch light left on at night or a food source.

Maintain your exterior

Your yard could also be attracting pests—anything around your exterior can shelter insects or, worse, serve as a welcome mat into your home. To help prevent this, trim your trees and shrubs so they don’t touch your home, and keep firewood, leaves, and yard debris at least twenty feet away.

Seal your home

Next, block off their entry points. Even tiny gaps around doors, windows, vents, and baseboards can let critters in. Inspect your home carefully inside and out, and use caulk, weatherstripping, or mesh screens to seal openings. Keep in mind that seasonal changes can shift your home and create new cracks, so check back every few months.

Keep it clean

A tidy home is one of your best defenses against bugs since regular cleaning helps eliminate what they’re after. Regularly vacuum under furniture and in corners, wipe up spills immediately, store pantry items in airtight containers once you’ve opened the original box or bag, and clear out expired food ASAP.

Call in the pros

If you’ve done your best and pests are still sticking around, it might be time to hire a professional. They can identify hidden trouble spots, treat your home effectively, and provide tips for preventing future problems.

SAVVY *Gardening Hacks*

written by **ANDRE RIOS**

When it's at its best, your garden should feel like your own private slice of paradise, replete with colorful flowers, lush shrubbery, and the cooling shade of proud trees. But the intense maintenance required to keep up this area can sometimes make it feel more like a burden.

Why not take some of the sweat out of gardening so you can enjoy your outdoor space? Whether caring for greenery is one of your favorite hobbies or you're looking to invest less time and money into yard care, try these five solutions. They're suitable for landscapes in just about every American climate.

PLEASE YOUR POLLINATORS

Butterflies, bees, and other beneficial species aren’t just pretty to look at; according to the experts at the Pollinator Project, they’re also responsible for supporting between 75 and 95 percent of *all* plant life. So rather than deterring them with toxic insecticides, attract them by putting out small cups of water.

Providing pollinators such hydration stations in floral shades like light yellow and pink can draw them into your garden. Apply just one teaspoon at a time to each container (to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in them), and change the contents often to keep them fresh—pollinators will thank you by helping your flowers bloom brighter and produce plants that yield more.



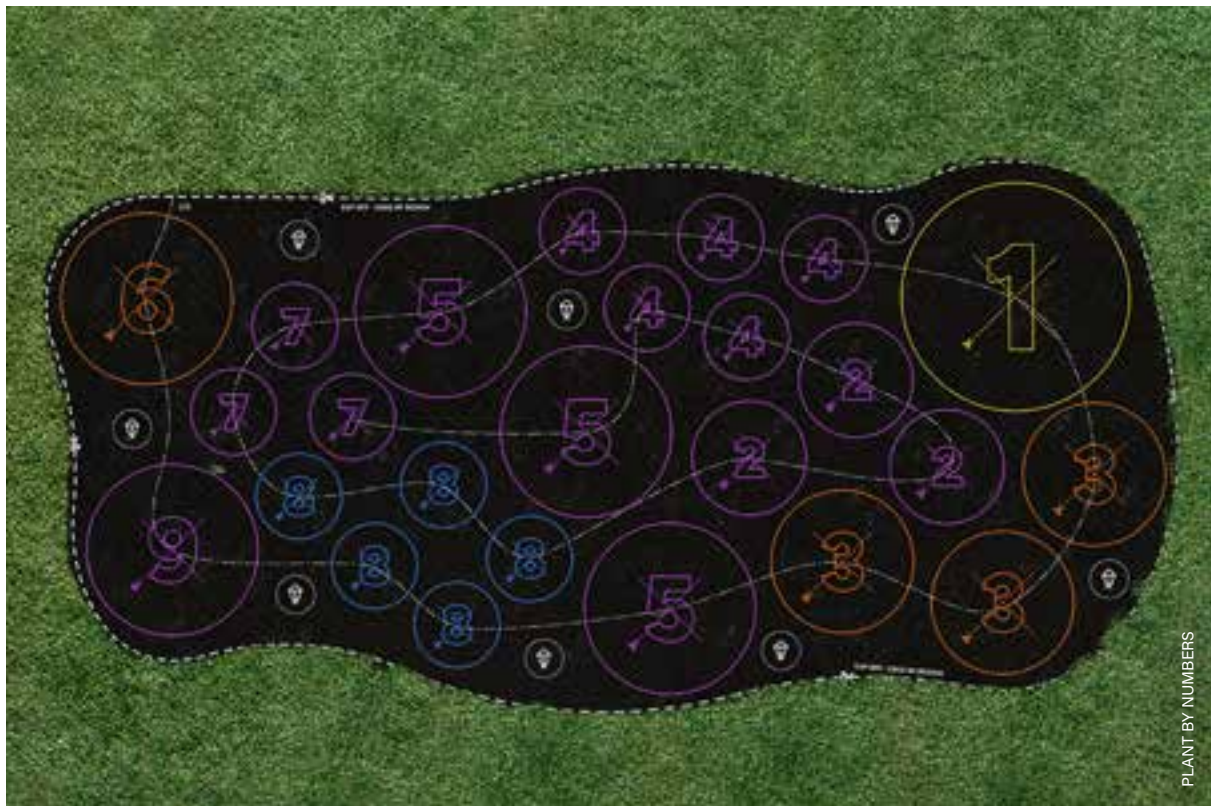
CHOOSE HERBAL EASE

Grass lawns are incredibly high maintenance, and depending on where in the country you reside, they can be far too water demanding for the environment, local ordinances, or your utility costs. To save resources, plant a more resilient herb garden. Paring down an expanse of troublesome grass with even a small section of these plants could make a significant impact.

Opt for species like oregano, mint, and chamomile, all of which can grow into eye-catching and healthy ground cover because they’re hardy, tolerate direct sunlight, and don’t need to be trimmed until you’re craving their fresh flavors.

LAY A ROCK GARDEN

Alternatively, you could go even hardier with boulders, colorful pebbles, pond stones, and other rocks. Talk about low-maintenance—such materials will create a striking garden while having virtually zero tending needs. Simply lay a variety of them in areas where your landscaping is struggling, and watch as the occasional wildflower, tree sapling, or other pleasant growth sprouts out of them. (If you find some unsightly weeds, they’ll be easily removable.) You could also plant vines to sprawl across your rock garden for a lush look.



For the most attractive results, try this simple approach: Imagine a series of ribbons extending from your curb to your foundation, then set down rocks in alternating heights within each row. The variety of sizes, colors, and textures will catch the eye and elevate your curb appeal far beyond what a struggling lawn could.

TRY PLANTING BY NUMBER

There are also fun, virtually effortless ways to plan your garden, such as by utilizing Plant by Number. This company takes the stress out of installing a new green space with its easy-to-follow layout maps that you can customize based on your property, have shipped to your home, and position in the area of your choosing. From there, you simply fill them in with the best flora for each numbered spot—much like filling in shades in a paint-by-number coloring book.

Designs come in templates like Driveway Design and Privacy Hedge, so you can transform just about any zone of your yard into a lush garden. Intentionally planning your landscaping in this way helps ensure that you find the best species for each space's watering, draining, and sunlight needs. That way, your investments can not only survive the heat of summer but also flourish through the seasons beyond.

DIG WIDE, NOT DEEP

Once it's time to install flora, your instincts may be to grab a shovel and prepare to dig a trench so deep you're practically drilling for oil. But the width of the hole you dig actually matters more than its depth. Rather than boring to the exact deepness of the pot a plant has come in, create a wider, shallower circle that is two to three times its diameter. This will allow you to work with softer, more malleable topsoil while also helping you prep your new plants correctly, granting them space for their roots to expand and seek nourishing earth and hydration. Using this technique also encourages you to leave ample space between plants so they can mature horizontally as well as vertically and not compete for precious resources.

Following these hacks can help you cultivate a garden that promotes relaxation instead of causing stress. To make caring for these spaces even easier, don't burden yourself with chasing perfection. After all, every garden is a work in continual process, so if you experience setbacks, there is always room to grow.

A Georgetown Home

REIMAGINED

interview with **AZALI KASSUM**
written by **ALLISON GOMES**
photography by **JENNIFER HUGHES**



Azali Kassum, owner of Azali Kassum Design, offers an inside look into the eight-year renovation of her 1790s home in Washington, DC.



Tell us about yourself:

I live in the Georgetown neighborhood with my husband and three children. Though I was born in Boston, my family is from East Africa and India; my heritage is a big part of my love of architecture and design philosophy. I not only draw inspiration from my background and travels but also like to use natural materials and different design styles to create spaces that truly represent who my clients are. I tend to gravitate toward a minimalist yet warm and textured aesthetic, which pulls from multiple eras, and use a lot of sculptural and organic forms, pure materials, and neutral colors to create timeless spaces.

Have you always been interested in design?

I've loved architecture and designing spaces since I was little. Whether I was working on an art project or endlessly redecorating my childhood bedrooms, I would immerse myself in these imagined spaces. I also learned how to curate a room from my mother. She would take us to antique shops and auctions when we were young, and I'd watch how she'd gather treasures and place them in different spaces of our home. She would also collect items from our trips, which I enjoy doing as well.

I had hoped to study architecture and design after high school, but I ended up pursuing law instead. However, I continued to use design as my refuge throughout college, law school, and beyond. I lived in New York for a while, and my tiny walk-up rental became a canvas for me to experiment with different color palettes and furniture layouts. It wasn't until a friend asked me to help with their renovation that I seriously considered a career change, and my design work slowly transitioned from a beloved hobby to a business.

I tend to gravitate toward a minimalist yet warm and textured aesthetic, which pulls from multiple eras, and use a lot of sculptural and organic forms, pure materials, and neutral colors to create timeless spaces.

Would you tell us more about your property's history?

It was built in the 1790s and is sometimes called the “Seam House” because of the visible vertical seam running down the front. It’s actually composed of multiple parts that were constructed at different times and then connected later. There is an original two-story core at the center of the house that was used as a workshop. Then, Washington Bowie, a prosperous Scottish tobacco merchant and godson to George Washington, purchased the home in 1814. In the middle of the nineteenth century, he added a larger two-and-a-half-story addition to the front of the house to bring it forward to meet the sidewalk. Later, the walkway between this house and the one next to it was closed in with new brick to create a front door at the street, hence the presence of the vertical seam.

How did you approach your home's renovation? What was your primary goal?

The design evolved a lot during the renovation. The whole project lasted eight years, and when we started, it was just us and our dog, but by the time we had drywall up, we were expecting twins. So we wanted to keep the spaces as open and fluid as possible, which really guided the design as the project progressed. Rather than following the more expected path of a traditional restoration, though, I embraced a pared-down, edited, and fluid approach, exercising more deconstruction and restraint. This was inspired in part by the history and character of the house itself.



I really wanted to maintain the original envelope but create a sense of lightness as you moved from old to new. This meant balancing new items, such as the sleek white-lacquer cabinetry, with the original heart pine flooring and exposed beams.

Did you take on this project yourself, or did you have help?

I collaborated with architect Christian Zapatka throughout the process. As with any home in a historic district, we had to consider how we could make the design feel seamless within the context of the surrounding homes. We drew from renovations of row homes in Amsterdam and apartments in Paris to help us find that intentional balance between old and new.

Overall, the project quickly went from a light remodel to a full-fledged gut, and we ended up designing a new three-story addition in the back. I also wanted to bring in as much natural

light as possible, which resulted in us adding the large steel-cased window at the back of the house. It spans two floors and anchors the floating stairway we designed into the kitchen.

How did you decide what to strip back and what to leave as is?

When my husband and I bought the house, the beams in the dining room were heavily coated in layers of paint. At first, stripping them down was a necessity so that we could repaint them. But once we saw them in their natural state, with only echoes of paint remaining, the whole room came back to life. This area also had a heavy chair rail and a small staircase in the southwest corner, which we removed to gain space on the floor above; that area’s now the primary bath. With these features removed, the beams really took center stage and floated on the plaster ceiling. The room is truly the heart of this house and has been the stage for all our family celebrations.





What was the biggest challenge you encountered along the way?

We initially wanted to knock down the wall in the foyer to create an open plan, but once the drywall was removed, it revealed an original double parlor door. We decided to preserve the brick and the opening instead, so a challenge became an opportunity. Now, when you walk through this space, you see the powder room nestled into what was once the back entrance in addition to the original weathered stone threshold.

How did you go about curating furniture and decor for your home?

It was an evolutionary process. At first, I was driven purely by utility and sought functional items that the twins could easily navigate. But these ended up overwhelming the space and felt too forced. Living in the house helped us figure out what would work best. Ultimately, my love of vintage and midcentury modern pieces drove the design and allowed the house to breathe.

I also wanted to bring in pieces that draw you in with curves and natural materials, as well as ones with history. The first item I found was the Matégot-inspired rosewood console in the dining room. It provides such a fun and unexpected contrast to the cabinet my mother gave me from India, which dates back to the British colonial era. And it proved to be a perfect object to tie the older part of the house into the new steel-cased windows. Pairing this with vintage glass paintings from Asia—which are also from my mother—and modern-day ceramics represents how we blended different eras in the house.

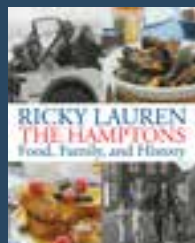


I also found an antique mirror (which actually came from another house in the neighborhood) at a shop down the street from us, and it now anchors the living room. When you sit at the end of the kitchen island, you can see all the way through to it, and it reflects the entire parlor floor. It's perhaps one of my favorite spots as it reveals each design detail and pulls the house together.

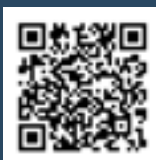
For more info, visit azalikassum.com

a taste of THE HAMPTONS

recipes by **RICKY LAUREN**
photography by **ANNE STRATTON**



Scan the QR Code
for the full cookbook.



Recipes excerpted from *The Hamptons: Food, Family, and History* by Ricky Lauren. Rizzoli New York, 2025.
Photography by Anne Stratton.

Serves 6

BLUEBERRY CRISP

Aunt Susan and I went blueberry-picking together with our young children in Amagansett. We decided to have a contest to see which team could pick the most berries. The smushed ones did not count. We had so much fun that we all forgot who won! I still remember how much we laughed. This crisp always reminds me of that magical day.

Ingredients:

FOR THE BASE

3 cups fresh blueberries

2 tablespoons sugar

Juice and zest of 1 lemon

FOR THE CRISP TOPPING

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour

1 cup packed light brown sugar

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups rolled oats

6 tablespoons ($\frac{3}{4}$ stick)
salted butter, softened

Instructions:

1/ Preheat the oven to 375°F.

2/ **TO MAKE THE BASE:** Toss the blueberries, sugar, lemon zest, and juice together in a bowl. Pour into a 9-inch square baking dish.

3/ **TO MAKE THE CRISP TOPPING:** In a food-processor bowl, mix the flour, brown sugar, rolled oats, and butter and pulse until the mixture resembles crumbs. Spread this over the berries.

4/ Bake until golden on top, 40 to 45 minutes.

Serves
4 to 6

PASTA

with Hamptons Summer Vegetables

For this recipe I always use the freshest, youngest, and most tender vegetables that are available in season. Growing them yourself or picking them up at a local farmstand is the most fun. I enjoy gathering baby peas bursting from their pods, sweet baby carrots, ripe tomatoes, and young, proud green-and-white asparagus spears, to which I add tender zucchini. I always marvel at the colorful selection in my basket. Generally, I combine the fresh vegetables with a delicate pasta like angel hair (capellini). Everybody likes this light spring/summer meal. Add a simple salad and a crusty breadstick and enjoy!

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons olive oil	1 cup snap peas
½ cup pine nuts	1 cup grape tomatoes, halved
2 cloves garlic, minced	¾ cup chopped fresh basil
1 cup sliced white mushrooms	Salt and pepper
1 cup sliced zucchini (yellow and green), lightly steamed	⅔ cup heavy cream
1 cup broccoli florets, lightly steamed	2 cups grated Parmesan cheese
1½ cups baby carrots, lightly steamed	1 pound capellini, cooked
6 green-and-white asparagus spears, sliced and lightly steamed	

Instructions:

- 1/** In a large saucepan, over medium heat, add the oil and sauté the pine nuts and garlic until golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes.
- 2/** Add the mushrooms and sauté for 2 to 3 minutes. Add the steamed vegetables, peas, tomatoes, a half cup of the basil, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook until the vegetables are heated.
- 3/** Stir in the cream, 1 cup of the Parmesan, and the remaining one-quarter cup basil. Serve over the pasta, accompanied with the remaining 1 cup of Parmesan for sprinkling.





Serves 6

RICKY'S CINNAMON AND VANILLA CHALLAH FRENCH TOAST

Served with Fresh Berries

I love to start my family's day at the beach with this lovely, warm, delicious breakfast. If I can sell seconds to them, then I am the Queen of the Kitchen! I use an egg challah. I cut it 1 inch thick and as much on the diagonal as possible to get the largest slices. French toast is best when it's crispy and golden on the outside and rich and custardy on the inside. The trick is for the bread to soak up the maximum egg mixture without falling apart in the pan. I love the smell of the vanilla and the sound of bread frying. Top it with cinnamon or powdered sugar, then berries on top for the visual effect after plating. You may also present this with grape jelly, strawberry preserves, a "honey bear," and a bowl of cinnamon sugar on the side.

Ingredients:

- 6 large eggs
- 3 cups low-fat milk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt
- 12 (1-inch-thick) slices day-old challah bread, cut diagonally
- Unsalted butter
- Safflower or canola oil
- Cinnamon sugar or confectioners' sugar
- Syrup or jam or honey

Instructions:

- 1/ Preheat the oven to 250°F.
- 2/ Beat the eggs, milk, vanilla, and salt together in a large bowl until cream-colored. Pour into a shallow dish. Dip the bread in the mixture, one slice at a time, until soaked.
- 3/ Sweep a stick of butter around the inside of a hot oiled skillet. Fry the bread in batches over medium heat until golden brown, turning once, about 3 to 4 minutes on each side. Remove to a baking sheet in the oven to keep warm until all the slices are cooked.
- 4/ Serve sprinkled with cinnamon sugar and syrup.

Serves 4

BARELY BREADED FILLET OF SOLE

Here is a simple way to make fried fish lighter and more healthful—and perhaps even to sell it to the children at the table. Bread the fish on one side only! It's crispy and delightful, and has fewer calories and a more delicate taste. Begin the meal with a soufflé and serve the fish with steamed chopped spinach.

Ingredients:

½ cup all-purpose flour
Lawry's garlic salt
6 (6-ounce) fillets of sole
2 large eggs, beaten
1 cup panko bread crumbs
1 cup oil
Lemon wedges

Instructions:

1/ Season the flour to taste with the garlic salt. Dredge one side of each fillet in the flour. Dip the floured side of each fillet in the eggs, then coat the same side with bread crumbs.

2/ Heat the oil in a skillet and fry the uncoated side of the sole first, until the fish turns white. Flip the fish over and fry until golden brown. Transfer to a platter and serve with lemon wedges.





HOW TO BLEND DIFFERENT DESIGN STYLES

written by **ALLISON GOMES**

When it comes to decorating your home, you'll see all kinds of furniture and decor online that fit neatly into a certain style category. But what if you're drawn to a little of this and a little of that? Your home doesn't have to be confined to one style alone. To help you mix different aesthetics, either because you enjoy variety or share a space with someone with different preferences, here are a few recommendations you can follow.





Even items that seem wildly different at first glance can work together when they share a common thread, which can help your collection feel more anchored.

Start with the 80/20 rule

The secret weapon for blending designs? The 80/20 rule, which suggests that 80 percent of the space reflects one dominant style and the remaining 20 percent showcases another. For instance, if you love a clean, minimalist look but want to bring in a few boho touches, most of your furniture should be sleek, but then you could layer in accents like a patterned pillow, rattan lamp, and colorful art piece for added flair.

Similarly, if you prefer farmhouse charm but want a splash of industrial edge, you'd keep most of your furnishings rustic and bring in other elements like black iron barstools or bronze light fixtures. This approach can help prevent the room from feeling disconnected, instead making the design seem intentional and cohesive. Of course, you don't have to literally measure your decor for exactness—just make sure that one style clearly takes the lead while the other plays a supporting role.

Find a common thread

When you're shopping for items, look for ones with some kind of commonality through their colors, textures, or shapes. To make a vintage velvet armchair and a sleek modern coffee table work together in your living room, consider finding an area rug that reflects the colors within both pieces. But if the table has any wood tones, you could instead connect the texture by incorporating other vintage pieces like wooden picture frames and vases. Even items that seem wildly different at first glance can work together when they share a common thread, which can help your collection feel more anchored.

However, if you find old and new pieces that you love but can't seem to connect, consider incorporating a transitional item, which can serve as a bridge between the two. Think of a midcentury-style console with rustic wood grain or a chandelier with both antique nickel and traditional crystal accents. These pieces can help quietly pull the look together without demanding too much attention.

Pay attention to scale and proportion

Even two items that are beautiful and cohesive can clash if they're out of proportion with each other, so you need to consider the size of your pieces and check that they take up the same visual weight. For example, a dainty side table might get lost next to an oversized modern sectional and a massive antique armoire could overwhelm a set of slender midcentury chairs. That's why it's important to keep your items balanced while also ensuring that each one not only flows well with the others but also feels right in the space.

Embrace your uniqueness

Ultimately, one of the best ways to make a mixed-style space feel intentional is to weave in personal touches that tell your story. A great way to start is by incorporating meaningful items, such as travel souvenirs, family heirlooms, framed photos, or handmade pieces, that speak to your experiences and interests. These details help your home feel warm and lived-in rather than stylish but uninviting.

And don't shy away from mixing in a few unexpected elements, either! A quirky accent chair, bold art piece, or vintage find may seem out of place at first, but it can quickly become a key focal point that adds charm and originality. By blending your unique personality with thoughtful design choices, you'll create a space that feels both cohesive and distinctly yours.



Seven Essential HOME ENERGY UPGRADES

written by
ANDRE RIOS

As technology changes, our homes often do as well. For example, modern houses are now being equipped with an array of energy-efficient technologies, so how well are you keeping up? Implement the following simple upgrades, and you'll utilize some of the most powerful, environmentally friendly, and cost-cutting solutions out there today.

LED bulbs

Start with a simple yet essential swap—hunt down any incandescent bulbs throughout your home and replace them with LED ones, which not only consume less power (about a fifth as much!) but also last longer on average. For added efficiency, install timers, dimmers, or sensors in both indoor and outdoor areas to limit overuse. You can even find smart bulbs that are compatible with your phone or smart hub, allowing you to voice-activate them and set up low-use modes like “Ambient evening mode” and “Reading light only.”

**Solar
lighting**

Outdoor lighting features could be some of the most helpful tech you install; however, they don't have to draw from your home's electric current to operate. Swapping to solar lights can save you money because they're essentially self-sustaining illuminators that never need to be plugged in. Some types offer even more benefits, such as water resistance, motion detection, and shatterproof bulbs.



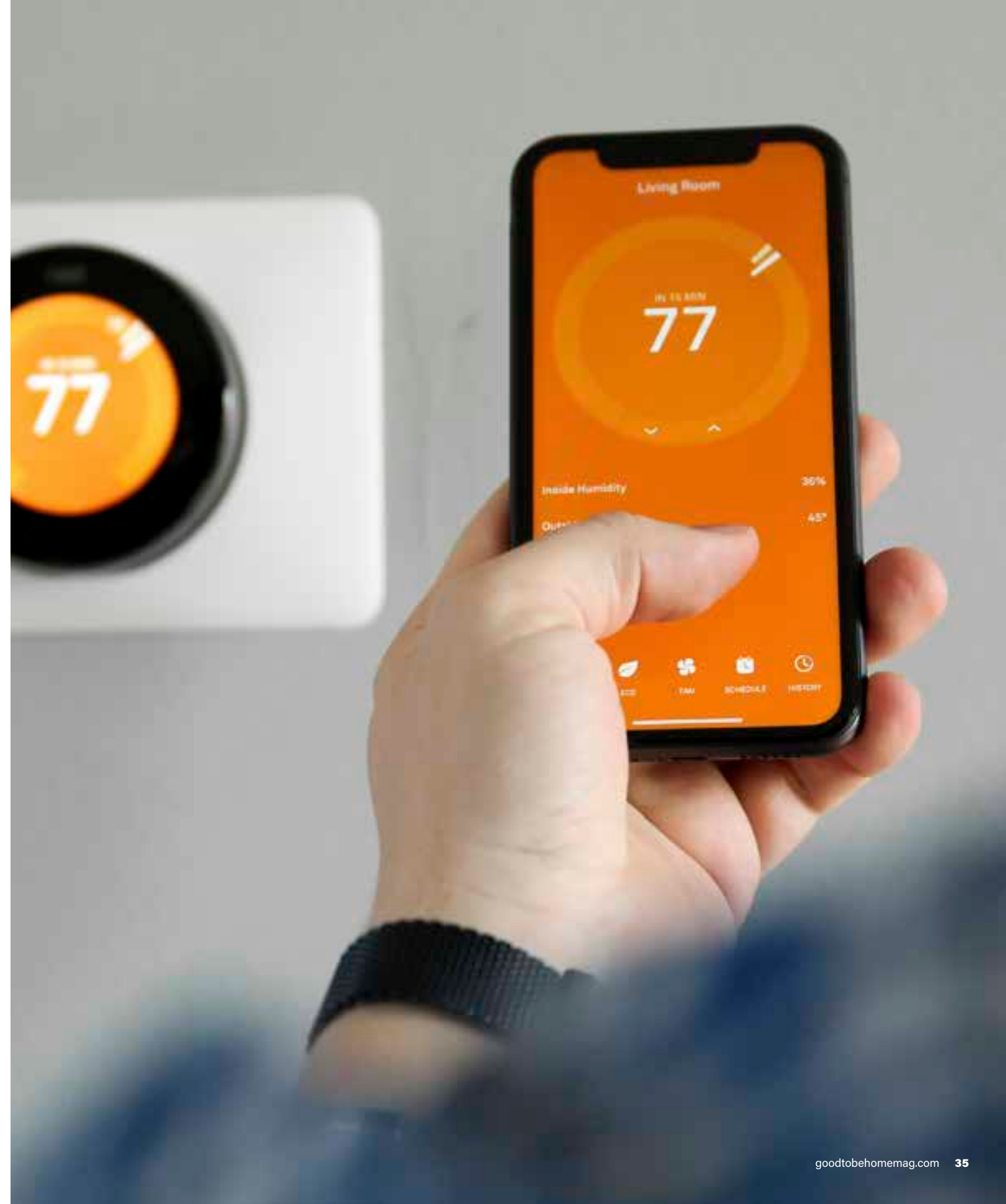
HVAC tune-ups

These preventative services can help keep some of your home's most energy-sucking components in top shape. By checking for potential issues, doing cleanings, and testing mechanical performance, technicians can help promote the most efficient cooling and heating possible. Spring is the ideal time to request a service because they can help prepare you for the hot months ahead, but be sure to make an autumn appointment as well for help with winterization.



Smart thermostat app

Upgrading your HVAC control unit offers a variety of benefits, not the least of which may be compatibility with a smartphone app. The Sensi app, for example, which works with thermostats of the same brand, enables you to regulate the temperature settings while you're away, build detailed heating and cooling schedules based on your routine, and even track your energy use in real time so you can ascertain periods of overuse and take corrective steps to save money.



Insulation

Instead of solely turning to your thermostat to enhance indoor comfort, though, evaluate how well insulated your home is. An insulation professional can identify any potential faults in your current protection, which may include temperature variations by room or heat collecting in your attic, and then suggest upgrades. These changes can significantly lower your energy bills by reducing heat transfer—in fact, according to the EPA, homeowners can save an average of 15 percent on heating and cooling costs by air-sealing and adding insulation. And because unprotected areas, like your basement, attic, and garage, can trap heat and radiate it indoors, insulating them can provide supplementary savings.



Smart plugs

For a quick, simple DIY upgrade, install this equipment virtually anywhere you plug in at least two electronic devices. More than just handy forms of protection against electricity currents (like their older cousin, the surge protector), smart plugs can help eliminate phantom power, whereby idle electronic devices such as TVs and set-top boxes continue using energy, needlessly adding to your utility costs. Addressing this problem can potentially save you up to \$200 per year. For even greater control over your utility usage, opt for a version that can detect energy use, identify major power drains, and even flip on and off in response to your vocal commands.



Energy audit

Did you know that professional energy assessors may be available from your local government or utility company? Book such an expert to thoroughly review your property, identify wasteful features, and recommend personalized efficiency upgrades. You can even talk to them about other smart swaps in this guide to determine how else you can make a major difference for the environment while saving serious money.

EXTREME WEATHER

HOME-PREP TIPS

written by **ALLISON GOMES**

No matter where you live, bad weather can disrupt your life in an instant. However, taking steps now can help protect your home, your loved ones, and your peace of mind when nature turns unpredictable.



KEEP THE LIGHTS ON

Power outages can happen anywhere at any time, but they're more likely during big storms. For added peace of mind, consider investing in a backup generator to keep your refrigerator, sump pump, HVAC, and other essentials running. Make sure it's properly sized for your home by adding up the wattage of the appliances and systems you may want to power (each of which can usually be found on the appliances themselves or their manuals); this will tell you the minimum capacity your generator needs to have. And depending on the type of generator and your local building codes, you may also need to have it professionally installed.

MAKE A PLAN

Having a designated area in your home for shelter can make all the difference in waiting out the storm with essentials, such as bottled water and nonperishable food, close at hand. For example, the best location during hurricanes and tornadoes is a small, windowless interior space on the lowest level of your home, like a basement, bathroom, bedroom closet, or interior hallway. Note, however, that if flooding is the concern, you should do the opposite: move to the highest floor of your home that's still away from windows and exterior walls. And be sure to put an evacuation plan in place, especially for floods and wildfires, including having access to emergency alerts.

PROTECT AGAINST FLOODING

In areas prone to floods, prevention begins long before the first raindrop falls. During the next rainstorm, step outside and watch how water moves around your property. If it pools near the foundation, it may be time to regrade your yard so it slopes away from your house. You could also install a French drain along the perimeter to help redirect any water.

For basements below the water line, a sump pump can quickly remove water during heavy rains. Just be sure to test it monthly or seasonally, especially before any big storms, so you know it will work when you need it most. Also, make sure to seal any cracks in your basement walls with waterproof caulk to keep liquid from seeping in. And because not all storms come with a warning, keep a few sandbags or quick-deploy flood barriers on hand to protect doorways and low-lying entrances.





DEFEND AGAINST FIRES

Taking proactive steps is also paramount with wildfires, which are often caused by lightning and dry conditions. Start by regularly trimming trees and bushes so they don't touch the structure or hang over the roof and storing firewood far from the foundation. In addition, clear leaves, pine needles, and other debris from your roof and gutters, since a single wind-blown ember can ignite them in seconds. For even stronger protection, consider installing metal wire mesh screening over vents to block embers and treating

exterior wood on your house with fire-retardant chemicals. If you want to go all in to protect your property, consider upgrading to fire-resistant siding and Class A-rated roofing.

You can't control the weather, but you *can* control how ready you are for it. Investing a little time and money now could mean that you'll face whatever may come next with more confidence.

For more info, visit ready.gov





Dennis Walsh



Teresa Walsh

teaching the tools of the RENOVATION TRADE

written by **ANDRE RIOS**

Renovating your home can elevate it to new levels of style, convenience, and even value—that is, if you handle it correctly. Enter Dennis and Teresa Walsh, who provide an essential tool for those tackling renovations: real estate know-how. Together, they teach people how to unlock hidden equity in their homes, make strategic improvements, and ultimately maximize their ROI potential.

A lifetime in real estate

The Walshes are no strangers to this industry. “I’ve worked in construction, remodeling, real estate, and architectural design and have been a professional trainer and speaker for over thirty-five years,” Dennis says. “I even started my first remodeling business at just fourteen.” Teresa, who has worked in real estate since age nineteen, inspired their current venture by wanting to create a helpful resource for real estate agents. Their efforts have led them to counsel approximately 200,000 business professionals, holding nationwide seminars and courses to share industry wisdom.

Elevating your home

Today, the Walshes’ work is centered around two key websites, including a consumer-

focused site, yourhome.academy, which offers courses like Residential Construction Mastery, a magnifying glass on how homes are built, including common methods, technology, and components from foundations to windows. “We walk you through the process from the ground up,” Dennis explains. Meanwhile, their Residential Remodeling Mastery class provides a detailed renovation road map, guiding homeowners, renters, and real estate investors through such topics as finding reputable contractors, exploring financing options, and avoiding common mistakes. (The couple also has a second site for real estate professionals, sellnewhomes.com, which teaches agents how to work more effectively with builders, developers, and new homebuyers.)



“[Sixty] percent of home shoppers say they want a brand-new home. However, about 38 percent of those are open to comparing new homes with existing ones to find the best financial fit.”

The course experience

When homeowners hop onto yourhome.academy, they can utilize the self-study training courses at their own pace; each totals about seven hours of instruction. Upon registration, users can download worksheets and interactive forms to better apply and retain knowledge. The construction course, for instance, teaches students how to read blueprints and scale rulers, complemented by printable examples they can follow. “It’s a one-on-one coaching set, but I say that we take people on a little journey,” Dennis says. Subscribers also receive lifetime access to revisit the materials.

From wholesale to retail

The core concept behind the Walshes’ homeowner courses is to help people “sell retail not wholesale.” Dennis breaks down the difference as “cleaning it up a bit, staging it, and then putting it on the market versus finding untapped equity in the home, making improvements to generate a profit.” He also offers a compelling example for

homeowners explaining why they should pursue selling retail: investing \$40,000 in strategic improvements could yield an additional \$40,000–\$50,000 or more in profit upon sale—a return of up to 120 percent.

Crafting a “new” home

The lessons to be gained can benefit house hunters as well. For instance, Dennis highlights a significant real-estate trend: “60 percent of home shoppers say they want a brand-new home. However, about 38 percent of those are open to comparing new homes with existing ones to find the best financial fit.”

This is where their residential remodeling course becomes invaluable. Instead of paying top dollar for a new home, he urges homeowners to find an older home with good bones that is yet to be updated, secure it at a better price, then take on the improvements themselves, ultimately creating a like-new structure. “As an added benefit, homeowners get to choose their preferred flooring, cabinets, appliances, and paint, personalizing the space to their exact taste—something not always possible with new builds,” Dennis notes.



Granted, this isn't a novel concept. Well-known TV shows and social media influencers have popularized home renovations and house flipping. But the Walshes' courses go further, offering homeowners practical steps for making these dreams come to life.

The remodeling value analysis (RVA)

A 2025 Houzz survey indicated that 52 percent of homeowners planned on undertaking major home improvements last year. To address such demand, Dennis teaches real estate agents to create a remodeling value analysis (RVA). Unlike a typical comparative market analysis (CMA), which just compares similar sold homes in a property's area, an RVA helps homeowners understand exactly how strategic improvements can impact their home's value—and which ones to pursue. This analytical process helps homeowners decide whether remodeling makes sense or if they'd be better off selling their current home and finding one closer to their ideal. "You don't want to be the most expensive home on the street because then the value of the other homes brings it down," he cautions.

What's next?

Dennis Walsh states that more resources are ahead for both of their platforms, and he's dedicated to keep making a difference for homeowners and agents across America. "We are in the process of recording several YouTube videos to help consumers of all kinds," he says. "Whether you're an owner or an agent, these courses could change your life."



For more info, visit yourhome.academy





how to reuse **RUBBER BANDS**

written by
ANDRE RIOS

Like many people, you may have plenty of office supplies lying around, including rubber bands. But even if the elastic loops have been used, don't trash them—these handy hacks prove that they can always bounce back.

BUNDLE STORED GOODS

Are you ready to make sense of your junk-drawer contents, craft supplies, and small home-maintenance materials? Use rubber bands to bind similar items to create order and eliminate endless digging. You can even color-categorize objects so they stand out clearly.

FILL A VASE FLAWLESSLY

It can be tough to keep floral bouquets and other vase fillers perfectly positioned. (If they're too top-heavy, they can even fall out of the vessel.) To make visually stunning arrangements stay upright, simply use a rubber band to tie their stems together snugly.

KEEP TABS ON DEVICES

Nothing says "tangled mess" quite like the area behind a TV or workstation. You can remedy the situation by using multihued rubber bands: simply wrap matching loops around each end of a plug, HDMI cable, or charger to easily identify which device feeds into which outlet.

GET A GRIP

A frequent bane of the kitchen is the dreaded jar lid, which may be sealed far too tight for you to get a handle on. A rubber band can save the day by creating friction and improving your grip, so wrap one around it for more leverage to pop it open with ease.

SAFEGUARD YOUR STEMWARE

Delicate wine and cocktail glasses deserve special treatment, but loading them into your dishwasher means risking chips and cracks. To breathe easier, tie several rubber bands into a long strand and use it to attach your glasses to the prongs, stabilizing them while they get clean.

CONQUER STRIPPED SCREWS

Pesky stripped screws will no longer respond to a screwdriver, making them challenging to manipulate or remove. To fix the problem, place a loose rubber band over the tool's head—you should create enough friction for it to grab on so you can finally twist them again.

BLUEBERRY CRISP



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BLUEBERRY CRISP

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE BASE

3 c. fresh blueberries

2 tbsp. sugar

Juice and zest
of 1 lemon

FOR THE CRISP TOPPING

$\frac{3}{4}$ c. all-purpose flour

1 c. packed light
brown sugar

$1\frac{1}{2}$ c. rolled oats

6 tbsp. ($\frac{3}{4}$ stick) salted
butter, softened

INSTRUCTIONS

1/ Preheat the oven to 375°F.

2/ TO MAKE THE BASE: Toss the blueberries, sugar, lemon zest, and juice together in a bowl. Pour into a 9-in. square baking dish.

3/ TO MAKE THE CRISP TOPPING: In a food-processor bowl, mix the flour, brown sugar, rolled oats, and butter and pulse until the mixture resembles crumbs. Spread this over the berries.

4/ Bake until golden on top, 40 to 45 minutes.

SERVES 6

Recipes excerpted from *The Hamptons: Food, Family, and History* by Ricky Lauren. Rizzoli New York, 2025. Photography by Anne Stratton.



Selling your home doesn't happen overnight. In fact, there are three phases to the process that are essential for a successful sale. This collection of tips helps move homes from "For Sale" to "Sold!"

Selling Tips



The Preparation Phase:

KNOW YOUR MARKET VALUE

Visit open houses, compare sale prices, or better yet, ask a real estate professional for a comparative market analysis (CMA) for your home. *Here's what you can gain:*

- a list of upgrades to help your home keep up with the Joneses
- a strategy for details that already make your home stand out
- a better perspective on your home's worth and your finances

INVEST IN AN INSPECTION

Catch the problem areas a shiny exterior is hiding before potential buyers do. Early inspection equals more time, and ultimately provides insight into your home's top needs.

PRIORITIZE IMPROVEMENTS

Start with the must-haves that solve problems, and then choose wisely. Change your mind-set from home to product when ranking projects.

DO HOMEWORK BEFORE HIRING

Don't rush to hire a contractor and purchase materials; compare at least 3 bids and ask for references.

Don't offer buyer credits against the purchase price—you'll be better off investing the money to get the work done before listing.

The Listing Phase:

PLAN FOR PRICING TO SELL

Start the pricing conversation early, and get more detailed as you get closer to listing. Decide on reductions and if-this-then-that scenarios. Write it down to use as a foundation when at a crossroads. Pausing to decide during the process may lead to lost interest or money.

SET THE STAGE

Staging is very different from decorating. In fact, it's the opposite—the top staging priorities are as follows: a thorough deep cleaning removing personal and quirky decor minimizing stuff and decluttering

SHARE HIGH-QUALITY PHOTOS

A picture is worth a thousand words (and scheduling a showing). Showcase the preparation phase—your hard work and investments—with high-quality photos (a must for the era of online searching).

STAGE FOR ONLINE/MOBILE DEVICES

Today's buyers are busy. Make sure that all of the listing details are at their fingertips, and that photos are high resolution, optimized for web/mobile.

Over 90 percent of buyers start their home search online, and many first impressions are from a screen, smartphone, or tablet.

The Showing Phase:

BE FLEXIBLE WITH OPEN HOUSE TIMES

The Sunday open house might seem disruptive to you, but research says that it is the number one successful showing time. Evenings are equally as important—remember, buyers have jobs, schedules, and could be traveling from a distance.

HIGHLIGHT LOW-COST LIVING

Energy efficiency, shade-baring trees, or a low-maintenance garden are major selling points to highlight.

KEEP UP WITH CURB APPEAL

Be prepared for eager buyers driving by your home before an open house, and maintain curb appeal throughout the entire showing process.

PAY ATTENTION TO SMELLS

Pet odors are the number one offender, but watch out for food smells and scents that are musty or allergenic.

BE MINDFUL OF FLOW

Have a friend do a walk-through of your home. Look for odd breaks from one room to the next, and group furniture into arrangements that inspire conversation.

The keys to a successful showing are simple—stay flexible, act with the buyer in mind, and when the showing begins, be gone.



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The Rising Cost of Living in South Florida: Why Many Are Moving North

As a real estate expert with 23 years of experience, I, Isdelmi "Ide" Acosta, a born-and-raised Floridian, have dedicated my career to helping individuals and families find homes that align with their lifestyle and financial goals. While South Florida has long been a dream destination, its rising costs are prompting many to seek more affordable alternatives—without sacrificing quality of life.



South Florida's housing market has become one of the most expensive in the nation. From Miami to Fort Lauderdale to West Palm Beach, skyrocketing home prices and soaring rental rates are squeezing residents. The median home price now far exceeds the national average, with even modest single-family homes often surpassing half a million dollars.

Renters face similar challenges. With limited inventory and high demand, monthly rent prices have surged, leaving many families spending a significant portion of their income on housing. This affordability crisis is making it increasingly difficult for young professionals, middle-class families, and retirees to remain in the area.

While South Florida's weather and lifestyle are major draws, many residents are finding that their money goes further in other parts of the state or even beyond Florida. Central Florida, the Gulf Coast, and northern counties offer lower housing costs, reduced property taxes, and a more relaxed pace of life—all while still providing access to Florida's natural beauty and mild winters.

Cities like Ocala, Gainesville, and Jacksonville have seen an influx of former South Floridians looking for more value in homeownership. These areas offer not only more affordable real estate but also a better overall cost of living, allowing families to enjoy financial stability and a higher quality of life.

SEVERAL KEY FACTORS ARE DRIVING THIS NORTHWARD MIGRATION:

- **Affordability:** Northern Florida offers significantly lower home prices and rental rates, making homeownership more attainable.
- **Quality of Life:** A lower cost of living allows for less financial stress and more disposable income for leisure and travel.

- **Remote Work Opportunities:** With the rise of remote work, many people are no longer tied to South Florida for job opportunities, allowing them to move to more affordable areas.
- **Overcrowding & Infrastructure Strain:** South Florida's rapid growth has led to increased traffic congestion, crowded schools, and strained resources, prompting some to seek quieter, less congested communities.

Despite these challenges, many remain committed to South Florida, drawn by its culture, diversity, and unbeatable climate. However, addressing the affordability crisis is crucial to ensuring the region remains accessible for all. Investments in affordable housing, improved public transportation, and incentives for first-time homebuyers could help alleviate financial burdens and prevent South Florida from losing the very people who contribute to its vibrancy.

Having closely followed these market trends, I've made it my mission to help individuals and families navigate their options—whether that means finding a dream home in South Florida or relocating to a more affordable area. If you're exploring your next move, I'm here to guide you every step of the way, ensuring you find a home that aligns with both your financial and lifestyle needs.

South Florida will always be a desirable place to live, with its stunning beaches and sunny skies. But as the cost of living continues to rise, many are finding themselves priced out, seeking refuge in more affordable regions. Striking a balance between growth, affordability, and quality of life will be key to ensuring that South Florida remains not just a place to visit, but a place where everyone can thrive.



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