

PERFECT HOMES



Hereford Times

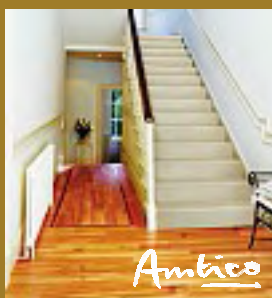


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A touch of the Med

WHY not make your home light and bright by creating a sunny Mediterranean-style scheme?

You can take inspiration from books, magazines and pictures or, if you've been lucky enough to visit the Med this summer, you can include some of the colours, textures and styles that will remind you of your holiday.

Here are some ideas for areas and themes to focus on. **PAINT** You can make a dramatic transformation to your home simply by changing the colour of paint on your walls.

For a Mediterranean feel, be bold and choose lavish colours like bright blue, lime green, orange, red and ochre and set them off against "whitewash". When you choose your colours, think of the aspects of the Med that they might evoke, so oranges and yellows for sunlight, blues and greens for the sea.

LIGHTING: As well as terracotta and wicker, wrought iron is widely used in the Med. You can reflect this in your choice

of furniture, fixtures and fittings, such as door handles and table legs.

Indoor lighting is also a great way to to reminisce about evenings spent under the stars; you might like to install downlighters in the ceiling of your living or dining room.

FLOOR TILES: Marble or terracotta tiles are popular in the Med because they help keep rooms cool. In our climate, it might not be practical to have them throughout the house but there's no reason why you can't incorporate this look into relevant rooms.

Kitchens are ideal while marble or marble effect is great for bathrooms. If carpet isn't compatible with your plans for, say, your living room, then laminate flooring is an ideal alternative.

BLINDS: The blinds many people most associate with the region are Venetian or Roman. Blinds are easy to install and come in a wide variety of designs and sizes. A variety of wooden, metallic and fabric are available.

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close to both work and play, with shops, theatres, bars and restaurants often on the doorstep or a short walk away."

For those looking to down-size, such as those nearing retirement age and wanting to liquidise their assets, or people experiencing a change in financial circumstances, the apartment can be a sophisticated bolthole which heralds an easier life.

"Companies have been quick to pick up on these trends and have focused on designs which offer much-needed flexibility of interior space, so that every square inch is accountable.

"To make a space feel larger, mirrors and glass doors are a clever addition to the decorating scheme.

"Likewise, pale or neutral shades can create an airy feeling but don't be afraid to use accent colours and patterns

(sparingly) to create interest and give rooms their own personality.

"Where feasible, keep floor finishes as consistent as possible.

"This will improve the flow from one room to the other, but again the look can be varied with a darker carpet in the centre, or an interesting rug to create interest.

"One of the latest trends is to bring the outdoors in and many apartments feature balconies which can be brightened with pots brimming with blooms."

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Peace and spa-mony

IS your bathroom a sanctuary which you can enter at the end of a stressful day and come out feeling transformed and relaxed?

As people become more aware of the detrimental effects of long-term stress on bodies, more and more are looking for ways to relax and unwind at the end of a hectic day.

The long-term effects of stress can include insomnia, and may cause suppression of the immune system.

It is, therefore, important that people find respite from the daily pressures which cause stress.

Help is at hand. The Jacuzzi whirlpool bath collection offers a choice of baths that will turn a bathroom into a haven of tranquillity.

Simply lie back in your own bath to enjoy the benefits of hydrotherapy.

The perception that hydrotherapy is an indulgent luxury has changed over the years as the benefits have become more widely understood.

A Jacuzzi whirlpool bath will invigorate in a morning and its revitalising warmth is the perfect passport to a restful night's sleep.

It has also been shown that hydrotherapy benefits people with specific illness and injury, especially those that induce joint and muscle stiffness or tenderness.

Apart from the physical benefits of the whirlpool bath, psychological changes in the body seem to be triggered, initially by the lack of gravity in the water and subsequent transference of heat into the body.



This helps people to achieve total relaxation.

A Jacuzzi whirlpool bath has jets which massage with high volumes of water mixed with air to reproduce, says the company, the soothing, deeply penetrating movements of a masseur's fingers with the warm, pulsating jets causing blood vessels in the skin and underlying tissue to dilate.

The increased blood flow, Jacuzzi maintains, allows cells to take in more

oxygen and nutrition while removing waste substances. With more than 30 different styles to choose from, Jacuzzi whirlpool baths come with a wide range of features and in different sizes.

The Jacuzzi bathroom collection encompasses whirlpool baths, shower brassware, furniture and accessories, and is sold exclusively through specialist bathroom retailers.

For further details call 01782 717175 or visit the website at www.jacuzzi.co.uk

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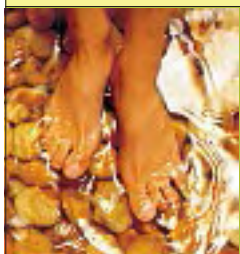
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ESCAPING the demands and stress of daily life isn't easy but the solution could be easier to find than you think.

The popularity of health spas means the room that was traditionally used merely for a brisk wash and brush-up is now much more and the trend is to recreate that sanctuary in your own home.

Today's bathrooms have become the ultimate escape room, where you can literally let your cares float away.

Cheryl Gurner, a director of Bathrooms International, whose clients include a host of celebrities, says: "A bathroom which doubles as a practical place for getting ready for the day but in the evening as a cosy retreat is an essential."

Everything is possible in today's bathroom, which benefits from the latest technology. There are baths incorporating muscle-easing hydro jets, light-changing effects to aid relaxation as well as showers that can mimic rainfall and waterfalls. If your bathroom is dated or a chilly sterile room that doesn't invite lingering, now could be the time for a revamp.

PURE WHITE: White sanitary ware is still the top favourite. Look out for ranges with classic rounded but contemporary lines. Include a double-ended bath and a granite floor. Add easy-to-install under-floor heating for a touch of luxury. Use

vibrantly coloured towels and accessories for warmth and impact.

TIP Install lighting to suit your mood with either a dimmer switch or low lights.

RETRO: Enjoy the Art Deco revival and create a monochrome scheme with a black granite floor and lacquered white units. Feature a bath with mirrored panels and a matching vanity unit. This look harks back to the 1930s Hollywood glamour and is particularly good for a smaller bathroom because glossy surfaces and mirrors make there seem more space and add light.

TIP Consider extra storage by creating a false wall with doors housing slim shelves or fit shelves to one side of a free-standing bath.

VINTAGE: Echo Victoriana with a free-standing roll-top bath with claw feet. This traditional look can give even a small bathroom instant atmosphere and charm. A free-standing bath is an advantage as you can use the surrounding area and perhaps include a comfy chair to relax in. Use simple white sanitaryware, and chrome accessories.

TIP Go for bronze finishes on brassware and add a bidet.

SPA SHOWER: A fashionable wet room – a tiled room which needs to be waterproofed – is ideal for those who prefer showers, but can be expensive and tricky to install.

Try installing a luxurious shower cubicle instead, which could cost around £3,000.

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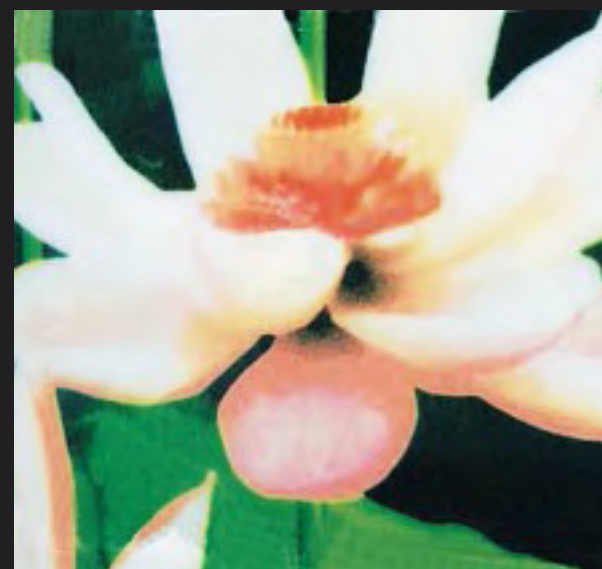
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THANKS to the cookery programmes that have found favour on the TV, cooking has become one of the nation's most popular pastimes.

But you'll need the perfect kitchen to create those culinary masterpieces. Yet you don't have to spend lots of money to keep up with the 'Olivers' – if your budget does not stretch to a complete overhaul, simply add a few fixtures for a unique look or invest in some modern units to quickly update your kitchen.

Improvements to the kitchen can be simple or more extensive depending on the amount you have to spend.

Many people don't realise that kitchen renovations provide the best return on investment of all home-improvement projects so any modifications will not only add to your enjoyment of your home but increase its value as well!

Choosing the right colour can really add to the atmosphere. Green is great for the kitchen as it creates a peaceful place to digest your food and enjoy the company of your friends.

Mixing colours and materials and experimenting with painting techniques like sponging (dabbing colour onto walls with a sponge to give a lived-in look) can add new depth. Complement your colour with accessories like decorative towels, copper pots and pans and fun place mats for the table.

Key focal points in any kitchen are the cabinets. Older homes often have dark wood cabinets that don't always sit well with today's lighter, more contemporary design schemes. You may not have the budget for a new set but don't worry – just invest in a new set of doors – an ivory shaker door coupled with a modern wide bow handle in aluminium will look fantastic in any kitchen.

If you want to be even more economical, simply sand down the existing cabinets and restain them in a new shade.

Cooking up change



Another idea is to fit decorative legs in place of a traditional plinth for a free-standing look. Try reeded aluminium finish legs for a contemporary finish.

Small but significant touches such as adding or changing handles to cupboard doors can also complement your design scheme.

If your budget doesn't stretch to renovating the entire kitchen, try replacing work surfaces and adding stylish accessories. Top it off in style with a wood, slate or marble finish that is extremely durable and designed to stand up to the demands of a busy family. To complete the look add a solid beech chopping block and a new ceramic sink.

Laminate flooring is great as it is easy to clean and resistant against fading, stains and scratches. Best of all LOC laminate flooring is now available which simply "locs" together, so no adhesive is required.

This makes it quick and easy to install and can be relaid up to six times.

Look out for FSC certified laminate flooring, which means that the wood has been approved by the Forest Stewardship Council and has come from well managed forests so your floor is environmentally sound too!

Another good choice is tile effect flooring in which the floor sections resemble real tiles but don't make your feet cold!

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Worktop wizardry heats up the kitchens

SLAVING over a hot stove has never been more fun!

Nowadays our kitchens are practical, high-tech havens where we can cook up a storm. The key ingredients are cool gadgets, with homeowners prepared to splash the cash on worktop wizardry that saves time or just looks great.

That means anything from a coffee maker or blender, to a state-of-the-art toaster or fridge with internet access. The only limit is the budget.

Anjum Ahmed, design director for Magnet Kitchens, confirms the trend: "Kitchens are already becoming more 'bling'," she says. "Customers are spending more than ever before on the most important room of the house."

That's confirmed by the launch of a £100,000 saucepan – the pot has solid gold handles studded with 200 diamonds. But hey, why break the bank?

Naomi Cleaver, style consultant for Magnet Kitchens, says: "People want to personalise their kitchens, cater for their particular cooking styles, and

also add colour by investing in counter top gadgets."

State-of-the-art coffee machines are a must-have to dispense that early morning caffeine shot or for late night entertaining.

Impress with a Diva coffee machine, (3) £395 from Home Temptations, in chrome and a splash of either red, cream or black.

Heat cups on the warm plate on top of the machine, just like in the Italian bars.

On a budget? Try John Lewis's Krups FMD395 Pro Arxoma filter coffee maker, £49.95. It makes up to 10 cups and has a strength selector.

Juicers are an essential for gym bunnies and a Breville Juice Extractor, £89.99 from Lakeland, makes short work of fruit or veg. Another good choice is John Lewis's Magimix Le Duo Juice Extractor, £119 (1).

Always wanted a Porsche? Settle for the Siemens Porsche 2 toaster, £129.99, a brushed aluminium futuristic gadget (4) with all the bells and whistles for fast-lane bread.

Paul Gibbs, kitchen buying

manager for B&Q says: "People are environmentally conscious and looking for ways to make kitchens more eco-friendly."

"There's a big demand for water-efficient appliances and accessories, such as our taps featuring an Eco Click device which restrains water flow, avoiding water waste."

Kettles use up huge amounts of energy, yet most people boil far more water than they need. Tefal's Quick Cup kettle heats water in three seconds and claims to provide a 65% energy saving. It costs £59.99 from Currys or major kitchen retailers. Marks & Spencer's Eco Kettle, £29.50, claims to save up to 30% of the energy used by a conventional kettle.

If you've got the funds, install instant boiling water at the turn of a tap with the Quooker tap (2).

The tap, which has a child-proof push and turn mechanism, can be fitted to existing kitchen units and has a three-litre water tank.

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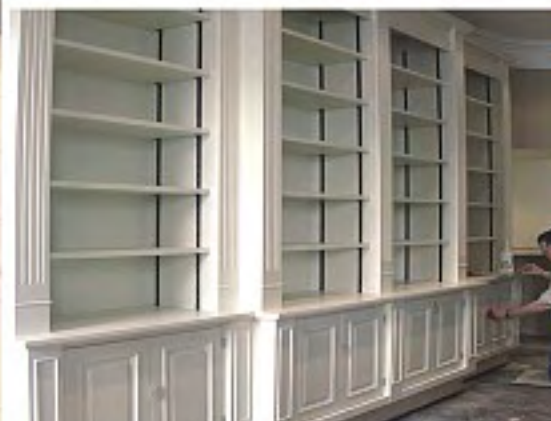
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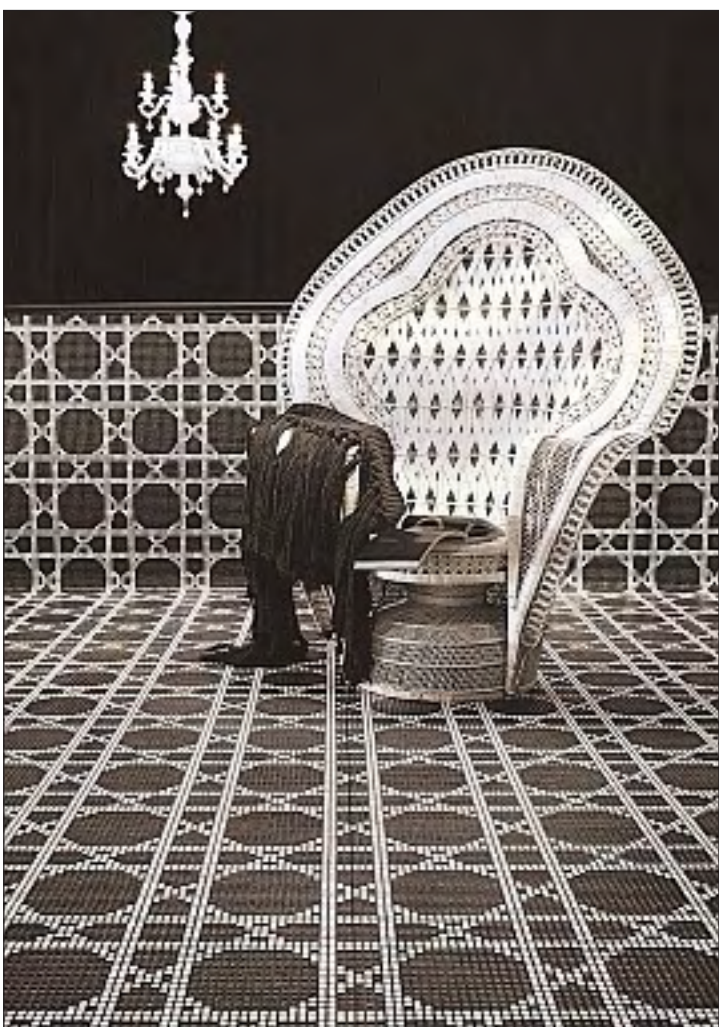


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▲ Vienna Nero, priced from £231 per sq ms. Stockist number: 020 7584 8837, website: www.bisazza.com

GONE are the days when carpet was the first choice for floors – now there's a dazzling variety of coverings, from classic wood and laminates to ceramics, stone or practical vinyl.

The style you choose should be the start of your decorating scheme as a good flooring will outlast several changes of decor.

Ideally, flooring should make a statement but not dominate your room. Soft and hardwood flooring are popular options, and can range from simple stripped floorboards to solid wood.

Carpet is soft and luxurious and there's a massive array of styles on offer, while rugs provide spectacular focal points.

The key to success in selecting your floor covering is to choose the most suitable material for your room. Consider cost, maintenance, durability, comfort and style.

STONE & TILES

Always particularly good for busy areas such as hallways, kitchens and bathrooms but feature in other areas as the popularity of beautiful stones like limestone grows. Look out for slate.

Bisazza's tile ranges are the choice of interior designers but, if they're out of your budget, use them as inspiration. Its dazzling monochrome Vienna Nero starts at £231 per sq mt, and Embroidery Red from £349.

Fired Earth's selection is just as desirable. Conjure memories of holidays with its Island Pebble flooring in Moloku Sand, which is in four finishes. It costs £98.70 a sq mt while Encaustic tiles come in aubergine, olive, verdigris, and are £93.71 a square mt.

WOOD

A good quality hardwood floor, well made and well laid, will become an integral part of a home.

Increasingly people are spending more on a solid floor which they regard as an investment, but lookalike laminates are getting ever more sophisticated.

Fired Earth's solid wood flooring ticks all the boxes on quality. Its selection is extensive but a popular choice is the Character Oak presealed flooring (width 11cm). It costs £49.95 a sq mt.

VINYL, LINO & LAMINATE

Vinyl and lino, once the poor man's flooring choice, is now anything but since designers have seized on them



▲ Dylan runner £45, Dylan rug £60. Both from Laura Ashley.

and given them brilliant makeovers.

They're softer under foot than stone, particularly suitable if you have young children, and visually it's difficult to tell apart from the material it mimics, such as stone or wood.

Amtico's new range Fossil Stones

■ continued on facing page.

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■ continued from facing page.

adds to its Stone collection. Each of the new stone designs depict an image of fossil fragments, and are in neutral shades such as Limestone Malt, Jura yellow and Fossil Limestone at £55 per sq mt.

Meanwhile, B&Q's flooring comes in a range of effects from stone to wood.

ECO FLOORS

Green chic is all the rage and using natural materials for flooring that don't harm the environment is easy if you chose from Crucial Trading (01562 743747/www.crucial-trading.com), which has flooring in wool, sisal, coir, jute, seagrass, paper and bamboo.

Designer wool carpets and a complete selection of flooring in natural fibres and materials are also on offer at the Alternative Flooring Company.

CARPETS/ RUGS

Carpet: decide what type – wool, twist, shag pile, linen, cotton, nylon or tufted.

Always take a sample home, don't skimp on underlay, and invest in a stain inhibiting treatment.

The Carpet Foundation (www.comebacktocarpet.com) offers expert advice on choosing and buying.

Rugs are booming in popularity as they're the ideal top dressing for hard flooring.

There are excellent selections to be found at Laura Ashley and Marks & Spencer.



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Let's get into the groove

THERE'S something really rustic and simple about wooden floors that many homeowners love and the fact they are durable and low maintenance are real selling points too.

For people not lucky enough to have wonderful old floorboards or precious parquet blocks hiding away beneath their tatty, old carpets, laminate flooring is a popular way to mimic the effect and create a similar illusion.

But if you're fortunate enough to have the real thing – and want to restore it to its former glory – then it is time to set to work making these original features a real focal point of your home.

There'll be less work to do if your floor is in a fairly good state and you only want a simple finish but otherwise the job can be rather long and physically tough, so make sure that you are prepared for being all achy once it's finished.

The first step is to get rid of any flaky, tatty, cracked, discoloured old paint or varnish that's seen better days and has gone beyond the point of no return.

If you simply slap a new layer on over the top, you'll end up with a really patchy result because the paint or varnish will sink in and dry unevenly.

You can hire sanding machines from hire shops and may be able to strike a deal with the manager if you have

a big job to do and need the equipment for longer. When working out the costs, remember to allow for the fact varnish and paint clog sandpaper very quickly.

By sanding the surface, you will restore it to a clean, natural grain, flattening it down as you go.

Although this smooth, sleek, even look is probably exactly what you want, those with older properties might like to think twice about removing the character of worn, undulating floors.

If you decide sanding isn't right for you or the property, you can strip off the old varnish by using a suitable chemical stripper.

Whichever method you go for, be sure to take all the necessary safety precautions.

You may find some areas of old varnish won't budge, for example where floorboards or parquet blocks meet and aren't lying flat.

In this case, you'll have to get down on your hands and knees and remove it using white spirit, steel wool or a scouring pad and a good old-fashioned dose of elbow grease.

Work in small areas at a time, letting the white spirit

soften and dissolve the polish, then use a scraper to remove the gooey mixture, wiping away any residue with an old rag.

Make sure you remove every last morsel of old varnish as new varnish won't stick otherwise. It's a tedious and slow job but one that's definitely worth doing properly and not cutting corners on.

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Techno vogues



WE used to play cards and games, or gather round the piano for a sing-song.

Many of us still enjoy these pastimes but with today's technology, home entertainment encompasses so much more; from a simple CD system in a child's bedroom to a full-blown dedicated home cinema room, or sound and vision all around the house at the touch of a button.

Equipment has become smaller, easier to hide, easier to link to TV and computer systems and far more convenient, far more reliable, far more capable.

Let's start with a straightforward hi-fi system in the lounge. Then link your TV to this for better sound quality for the programmes.

Next link the hi-fi system to speakers in another room, say the kitchen or dining room. Maybe then add one centre and two small rear speakers to the hi-fi in the lounge and you've got your home cinema system, mak-

ing it possible to build a good quality system over time. For greater sophistication wire the house for sound and vision in all rooms, controlled by discreet wall panels. Speakers in the ceiling are all but hidden and give great results. If you want to watch TV in the bathroom, no problem, there are water-proof screens about.

Another suggestion is to extend the hi-fi system outside to the patio with weather-proof speakers.

Companies which provide these include screens from Loewe, speakers, notably B&W, Monitor Audio and Kef, and electronics by Denon, Yamaha, QED, Arcam.

This is a specialised field however, so do take advice from experts.



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OVER the past couple of years the market for home-cinema systems has almost doubled with one in eight households now owning one.

The choices to enjoy a cinematic experience are plentiful with a burgeoning number of boxes being manufactured to satisfy our craving to eat popcorn at home.

Now, combined with the wealth of wizzy technology we can install, they're even helping to sell houses. Forget those old tricks like conjuring

the alluring smells of coffee or fresh baked bread to lure buyers.

Now the size of a plasma screen TV has more impact, and the bigger the better.

Amanda Lamb, presenter of TV's *A Place In The Sun*, says: "Potential buyers are always impressed with modern technology and in my experience it's been known to clinch a sale."

"It doesn't matter that the TV or sound system will no longer be there when they move in, it's simply being

able to see how good the house looks with the latest gadgets and equipment." It's all about selling a lifestyle and it particularly influences first-time buyers. Also, people like to be able to see that there's enough room for a large flat screen TV.

A Comet survey revealed that one in three buyers were influenced by plasma screens, home cinema systems, American-style fridge freezers, wine coolers and remote control garage doors.



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Light years ahead



LIGHTING is probably the most flexible decorating medium you have within a home.

You can change the mood of a room with the flick of switch and, as the nights draw in, perhaps now is the time to start thinking about a few subtle changes.

Although we tend to have lights in our rooms as a practical consideration, we sometimes forget that they can be used to enhance furnishings or decor, or even change the colour of a room.

Every room has different requirements. In the kitchen, for example, the amount of light is important, so fittings or lamps which provide a lot of light are essential.

But where light is used for decorative or social purposes, the most important consideration is the quality of the lighting.

You could consider anything from a false ceiling with subtle lighting to pelmet lighting to achieve an intimate and relaxed environment.

Over the dining table you will certainly want

a lot of light. A rise and fall fitting is easy to fit and provides sophisticated lighting.

A dimmer control means that you don't have to contend with bright lights while you are eating.

Fluorescent lighting with a shield is ideal for working areas in the kitchen or angled spot lamps in a cluster directed at various points in the room look up-to-the-minute and are practical too. A wide variety of lighting fittings is available.

But in addition to conventional types, there are downlighters, spotlights, fluorescent

tubes and much more besides. The lounge opens up all sorts of possibilities. Aim for pools of light around the living area with spotlights, standard lamps or table lamps.

Remember bad lighting can be dangerous.

It is essential that two-way switches are fitted at the bottom of stairs and try to ensure that each bedroom has a bedside lamp.

You can, in fact, buy bedheads which incorporate lighting.

There should be a good amount of light in hallways and, with halls, overhead lighting is probably the safest, illuminating the whole of

the floor area. Bathroom lights should be as bright as possible, bearing in mind that men will want to see in the mirror to shave and women will want to do their make-up.

Mirrors are available incorporating lighting and a shave point and some types of wall heaters incorporate lighting too.

There are special safety regulations for bathrooms. You should not use bare bulbs and always remember to have cord instead of a switch inside or a switch outside the bathroom. For ideas, see our feature on page 93

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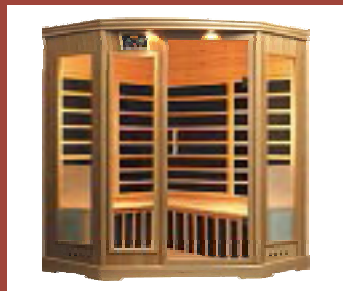


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Ins and outs of design

STYLISH interior design can extend outdoors to create comfortable and relaxed living spaces.

From yard art to atmospheric lighting, bringing the indoors outside has never been so easy.

Melloney Hunt, of Laura Ashley's design service, says: "In creating a comfortable outdoor living space, consider it an extension of your home."

"Take inspiration from the plants and flowers around you and choose co-ordinating colours."

When the sun is shining, ditch the dining room and head outdoors.

To provide the perfect base for accommodating guests try Wyeval's sophisticated Andrea six-seater garden set, £1,699.84, or for a casual beachside look, opt for B&Q's funky Hawaii four-seater dining set, £99.98.

For barbecues Look to Home Temptations' (0870 428 0958/www.hometemptations.com) cheap and cheerful Galzone BBQ grill set, £15, or for serious chefs, Lakeland's Dancook fire-place (01539 488 100/www.lakeland.co.uk), £149.99, will act as a gathering and focal point in your garden.

Warm up your table for entertaining with colourful accessories and if you don't fancy spoiling your best silverware,

there are plenty of stylish and colourful plastic cutlery sets available.

Melloney advises: "For a relaxed look choose natural fabrics such as cottons, and linens in a mix of floral patterns, with checks and stripes."

"Add tie-on seat cushions to chairs and dress a dining table with co-ordinating table linen and china."

It's the little touches that make all the difference in transforming a lacklustre garden into a summer retreat.

Lighting is all-important for those occasions when afternoon dining spills into dusk celebrations.

For pretty floral decorations try Laura Ashley's pink floral and pink spot paper lanterns, £10, or Next's colour changing LED lotus tea lights, £12.

Don't let the weather dampen spirits if it gets a little blustery outside.

Invest in a practical lamp like Marks & Spencer's glass pan hurricane lamp, £15.

If things aren't blooming in your garden, make your floral efforts elsewhere.

Brighten up your outdoor space with Woolworths' sunflower string lights, £9.99, or B&Q's pretty sunflower yard art, £14.98.



Sunflower yard art, £14.98, from B&Q.

Melloney says an al fresco delight is possible with a few stylish steps.

"Consider adding a vase of freshly cut flowers to a table and hang tea lights in paper lanterns or jam jars from surrounding trees," she says.

"Place storm lanterns among the flower beds to give soft ambient lighting when the sun goes down."

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If you can't take the heat

IF THERE'S one place where the battle of the sexes truly rages it's in the garden during the barbecue season.

Women may be allowed to slave over a hot stove indoors but with a barbecue, men elbow them out of the way to seize the tongs.

Celebrity chef Antony Worrall Thompson, co-author of a new book, *Barbecues & Grilling*, is the first to admit it.

"Barbies are very much a man thing, something to do with our time spent in caves, sitting

around the camp fire, ripping chunks of flesh from recently roasted carcasses – the hunter gatherer, enjoying the spoils of the day," he smiles.

Luckily, Worrall Thompson and fellow author Jane Sutherland have put together the ultimate barbie "bible", with basic through to adventurous recipes and loads of tips. "There's more to barbecu-

Barbecues & Grilling

Antony Worrall Thompson
Jane Sutherland



ing than just sticking meat on coals – I want to help people bring a little flair and imagination to burgers and steaks, as well as experiment with more adventurous recipes," Worrall Thompson says.

● *Barbecues & Grilling*, by Antony Worrall Thompson and Jane Sutherland, is published by Kyle Cathie, priced £18.99.

500g pork fillet (tenderloin), cut into 24 chunks

1tbsp oyster sauce

1tbsp soy sauce

1tbsp rice wine vinegar

1/4tsp ground white pepper

1tbsp finely chopped red chilli

1tbsp grated ginger

1 shallot, finely chopped

24 chunks of fresh pineapple, cut the same size as the pork

Combine the pork and the remaining ingredients, with the exception of the pineapple.

Oriental pork and pineapple kebabs



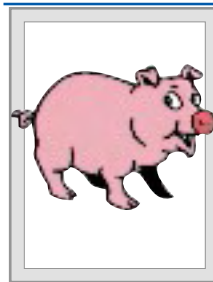
Cover with plastic wrapping and allow to marinate for three to four hours in the fridge. Remove at least 30 minutes before cooking. Meanwhile, soak eight small bamboo skewers in cold water for 30 minutes. Thread alternate chunks of pineapple and pork onto the skewers.

Set the kebabs on the barbecue grill over medium-hot coals and chargrill for 10-12 minutes, turning them from time to time until the pork is cooked through.

Brush the pork with any remaining marinade while it is cooking. Serve immediately.

Serves 4

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Got a yen for a water feature?

NOWADAYS, a water feature is more or less considered to be an integral feature of any garden design, whether it's simply for a focal point, a pond for wildlife or being used for its ambient sounds of moving water for relaxation.

Surprisingly, water features have been used in gardens for longer than you may think.

Way back in ancient Egypt, around 3,000 BC, we see the earliest records of gardens and, yes, these gardens did have water features, although most were used for practical purposes.

Gardens were mainly enclosed in a courtyard fashion and water channels were formed to irrigate the crops and plants.

Later in history, the Moorish gardens of Spain incorporated fountains into their courtyards where people could cool off and have some relief from the hot, dry climate.

In Japanese gardens, running water served a practical purpose and water features were sited near to teahouses, where the water was used for purification purposes before the ceremony itself, as guests would wash



cobble or millstone fountains.

If you are considering a water feature, you could opt for a formal type, such as a raised brick one.

The choice is endless and you're

bound to find a type to suit your garden, or even get someone to design one for you. Alternatively, instead of a simple water feature, you may consider having a pond.

If you are planning one of these, do remember it's best to locate it in an open site where daylight can get to surface-living aquatic plants. And avoid water near trees as not only will falling leaves clog up the water but tree roots may damage the pond.

There are several types of pond available, from concrete types to pre-formed fibre types, toughened plastic moulded ones, or butyl rubber sheet types.

their hands before entering the teahouse. Other practical water features in Japanese gardens include the "deer scarer", where the bamboo-pivoted arm collects water and then swings down against a stone with a loud clunk, thus scaring any deer or other wildlife away from the garden and crops.

These days, we truly are spoilt for choice with the variety of water features available, although the main consideration for any water feature is that of the safety of small children.

If you do have children, it is recommended you get the type that has a sealed reservoir, like the



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A lofty ambition indeed

IF YOU'RE planning to put your home on the market and want hordes of eager buyers knocking on your door, your property needs to be "fit for sale".

That means it should sport the most sought after features and also be in tip-top condition.

Ian Westerling, sales director at Hamptons International says: "Refreshing a home pre-sale is a shrewd move for potential sellers. Those who do are significantly more likely to sell faster and have a higher number of offers."

There's no need to splash the cash, even giving walls and ceilings a fresh coat of paint can revitalise a jaded home.

And don't just think cream or taupe as soft grey's also popular, and a fashionable choice is a feature wall in a single colour to give a room character. Westerling says: "Do clear away clutter as buyers want to visualise a space as their own and personal keepsakes and collections can be a distraction. But don't forget to set the scene. For instance, present a dining room as though it's ready for a dinner party, and in the rest of the house add colour with accessories like cushions, throws and fresh flowers."

Turning a loft into a room can add up to 15% on a home's value, according to property experts.

It's a popular choice with young homeowners who are most likely to carry out a loft conversion before putting their home on the market.

A survey by Birmingham Mid-



shires found that nearly 20% of homeowners aged under 25 opt for the improvement.

Bernard Rhodes, B&Q's building category manager, advises: "Pitched roof constructions mean lofts often have limited space and it's very easy for the area to feel cramped."

"Squeezing in two or three small rooms can make a space feel top heavy and out of proportion to the rest of the house. Instead, opt for converting it into a single large bedroom." His tip: Utilise areas behind the eaves as cupboard space, and always insulate.

He points out The Energy Savings Trust estimates that 26% of heat is lost through the roof, making uninsulated loft spaces extremely cold in winter.

▲ A loft conversion is one improvement which can add real value to your home.



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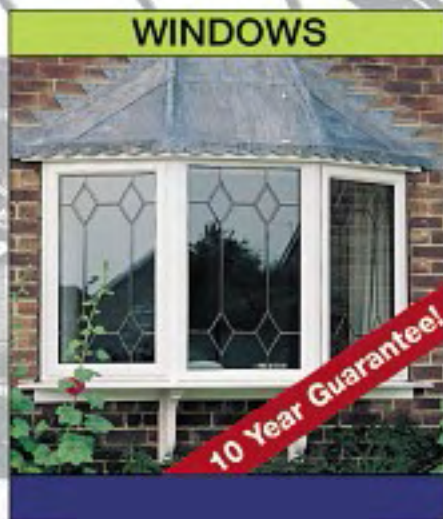
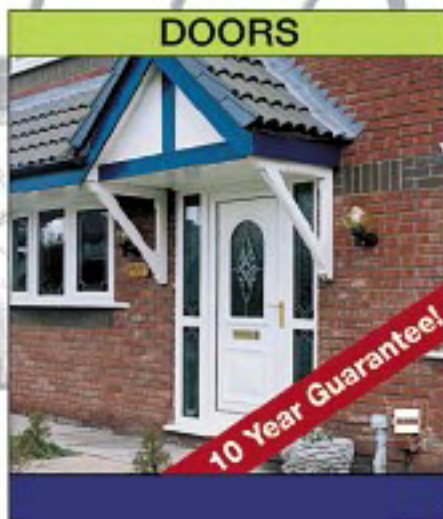
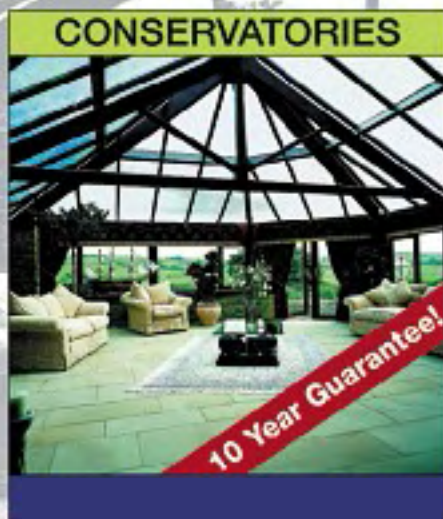
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