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Improvements add value

With the property market in a spin many of us will put off a move and decide to stay and improve. We ask the experts for advice on adding value to homes.

UNCERTAIN house prices, spiralling living costs, and the threat of recession could all mean the property boom of the last decade is over.

Experts predict that buying and selling homes will become increasingly difficult as the credit crunch bites.

But that doesn't mean you've lost out on your dream home, because, guess what? You could already be living in it.

It's amazing what improvements can achieve – whether they're investments such as a new kitchen or bathroom – or simply giving your home a spring facelift with a lick of paint and some new accessories.

Making a home more comfortable and desirable and ensuring all the space works hard, so it's more enjoyable to live in, can't be a bad move. Also, it'll pay dividends if you finally decide to put it on the market.

Follow our guide to adding thousands to your home's value and turning it into your perfect property.

● SMARTEN UP

"The biggest mistake people make is not keeping their house in good condition by carrying out regular maintenance," says celebrity builder Tommy Walsh.

"Keeping up with repairs is vital, not just so that it's comfortable to live in but also, if



you decide you want to move, then its condition will really count.

"If prospective buyers see leaking pipes and flaking paintwork, they'll worry that other more major jobs have also been neglected, potentially landing them with big bills if they buy your property."

● THINK KITCHENS

A smart kitchen can send the price of your home rocketing, according to research by Halifax.

Homeowners are now so fashion conscious about kitchen style that, in general, they renovate the room every three to five years.

But if you're seeking the right style, bear in mind that the trend is for kitchens to double as family rooms if space allows. So opt for wood finishes and coloured units to achieve a warmer and less sanitised look than the industrial style of a few years back.

More than ever, the kitchen is the heart of the home with two thirds of us saying we prefer to socialise and entertain in the kitchen rather than the living room or family room.

● DECOR POWER

Some experts believe that sub-standard DIY can knock £10,000 off the value of a home and major plumbing, wiring or construction jobs should be left to the experts.

Tommy Walsh says: "Planning is key to success, so write a list of what you want to do, the tools and materials involved and how long you think it will take."

"Decorating often goes horribly wrong because people rush into it, don't clear out the room properly and under-estimate how much time it will take."

If wallpapering, always buy an extra roll so you have spare paper in the event of mistakes or damage.

If you can't empty the room, move furniture into the middle and cover with dust sheets. Take up carpet and underlay.

If you are painting, work from the top down – ceiling, walls and then woodwork.

Use a flat finish emulsion, as silk will highlight every mark and uneven surface.



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Similarly, use eggshell on timber, particularly old timber, as it helps mask flaws and dents in the wood.

If painting new timber, use knotting fluid to prevent knots falling out, then use primer, undercoat and a top coat. For the best finish, Tommy advises two coats of top coat.

● BATHROOM BLITZ

These rooms are now all-singing all-dancing sanctuaries where we relax and unwind. So much so, we now spend as much on bathroom furniture as we do on bathroom suites.

Designer Linda Barker says: "Doing up a bathroom will really benefit a property. It should be more than a white suite – think about creating a spa effect, when low voltage ceiling lights and a set of plush towels could transform that room. "Spend time sourcing the right basin, there's a great range of styles out there to give your room an individual look and teamed with great tiles – glass or stone – your room will have individual style."

Never carpet a bathroom, it's impractical and looks wrong. Stone tiles or lino is ideal – ceramic tiles can be slippery –

and it's well worth investing in under-floor heating.

● BIG UP YOUR HOME

One of the surest ways to improve a home is to add to it and government figures show that planning applications have doubled over the last 10 years.

According to the National Association of Estate Agents, a well-designed extension could increase the price of a property by 10%. Garages, which can cost between £15,000 and £40,000 to convert, can recoup their costs. Don't overspend beyond your home's market value as you may not get the return.

Unconverted loft space, if made into a room, could increase value by up to 20%. If that room includes a room with a bathroom, it could add a further 5%.

Adding a conservatory is the third most popular improvement after a new kitchen and bathroom.

If you decide to go ahead, ensure it has heating and blinds so it's usable all year round, and make sure its style suits your property and doesn't eat up too much garden space.

An extra toilet (especially if it's downstairs) always features on the wish list of property buyers.

This needn't be expensive if you convert the space under the stairs. If you're on a budget you could fit one out for around £200 by using appliances from Homebase.

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Shower power

Shower power has swept the nation with Britons spending more time in the shower than any other country in Europe, according to a recent survey. We pick out the coolest showers around.

EXPERIENCING the feeling of warm, tropical rain, standing beneath a cascading waterfall or feeling the stinging exhilaration of a ocean-style spray was probably once limited to those who could afford holidays in exotic climes.

Now these are just some of the back to nature effects mimicking natural water flow that we can enjoy in our own bathrooms – under a shower.

Today showers are a far cry from an underpowered trickle in a cramped, damp cubicle.

They're sophisticated pieces of technical wizardry that can also incorporate indulgences from aromatherapy, massage, soothing lights, sound systems or even remote control so that a personal temperature and water flow can be pre-programmed.

An average shower uses around 60 litres of water every five minutes and, in our environmentally conscious times, many showers, including digital ones, have eco settings that minimise water wastage.

There are all sorts of reasons for our preference for showers – including lacking the space for a bath or the time for a leisurely soak, believing it's more hygienic to wash in running water, or worries about wasting water.

But before installing a high-tech new shower in your home, always check to see the water pressure it requires, whether it needs both cold and hot water supply lines, and if drains are adequate for any increased flow of water they may generate.

●SHOWER CUBICLES

A shower cubicle can fit into a floor area of only 70cm square and doors can slide or fold if you're pushed for space.

Alternatively, screens or cubicles can be made-to-measure for awkward areas.

"The right enclosure for your bathroom is one that combines the look you prefer with a size and shape that suits your room," Farris says.

Shower enclosures come in two basic varieties. Framed enclosures are sturdy, economical and use a lighter weight glass than those used in trendy, frameless enclosures. These look clean and elegant but are usually more costly to buy and install.

●CLEVER SHOWER HEADS

No longer just round, now shower heads are appearing in a dazzling variety of sizes and geometric shapes, with a host of fancy functions that add to the sensory experience of showering.

Undoubtedly the stars of the show are giant rain effect shower heads.

"Rainhead showers are oversized shower-heads installed directly overhead and most are suspended from the ceiling," Farris explains.

"Waterfall showers are a variation on those and deliver a streaming sheet of water.

"Multiple head showers offer combinations of sizes, shapes and spray patterns at various heights which will spray in a vari-



ety of directions. Many offer massaging or pulsating action. But they may require a more substantial water pressure or larger supply pipes."

●SHOWER TOWERS

Columns or towers are very in vogue. These special units contain electric pumps that enhance water pressure as well as temperature.

"These provide the ultimate in showering luxury," Farris says.

"By pumping up the water pressure, they can produce exceptional massaging and pulsating action through a variety of showerheads and jets aimed at the whole body from head to toe."



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ideas for your bathroom or kitchen and turning them into reality, from start to finish. With their own team of experienced fitters dedicated to providing the very best service, they'll do it all ... including the vacuuming and disposing of the rubbish. Whatever your dream, Westdown can make it come true, with an extensive range of bathrooms including everything from the traditional to the contemporary - a classic roll-top bath to cutting-edge design.

As well as featuring 50 bathroom displays in their Plough Lane showroom, Westdown Bathrooms are also the region's only stockists of Cuisines Schmidt Kitchens, examples of which, incorporating Neff and Siemens appliances, are displayed in the kitchen showroom, which will have an increased range in the new year. Meanwhile, they will also be selling off two of their display kitchens next month.

Exactly the same principle applies to Westdown's kitchen service, the same 'from concept to completion' philosophy that ensures the customer gets the design they want, with minimal disruption and a home where the only trace of the fitters having been there is your beautiful new kitchen or bathroom.

Visualising your new bathroom or kitchen can be difficult - imagining how a room you've seen in a brochure will look in your home is not always easy and mistakes can be costly. At Westdown Bathroom's showroom, the bathrooms and kitchens on display provide a real idea of how they look, while computer-aided design by Kelly Beavan, Steve and Caroline's daughter, will provide you with a virtual image of your bathroom or kitchen.

In the tile showroom, Bob Isom, who has more than a decade's experience in tiles, offers an extensive selection of tiles, both ceramic and natural, which, together with a great range of accessories, ensures that Westdown Bathrooms is the only place you'll need to go - the complete one-stop shop.

Whether you already know exactly what you want in your bathroom or kitchen, or you're looking for a little or a lot of inspiration, the experienced team at Westdown Bathrooms led by Margaret and Kelly will provide all the information, advice and assistance you need to get it just right.

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Tables are tops

BEDROOM partners are seldom perfect in every way – but when they become tired looking, scruffy and frankly past their sell-by-date, they should be ditched.

Actually, it's nothing personal – the bedside table is one of the most useful pieces of furniture in the house but one that can be so taken for granted.

Be inspired by our selection and other top tips on creating a dreamy bedroom.

BEDSIDE DATING

Match your bedside table to your needs. Followers of fashion won't want a table that looks dated. Toby Ash, Creative Director for New Heights, advises: "Walnut and oak are extremely popular at the moment, creating strong yet sophisticated looks.

"We've seen a breakaway from the very minimalist look over the last year. Clever detailing and subtle style references to movements such as Art Deco, arts and crafts, oriental and Scandinavian furniture are becoming more popular to create a bedroom with more personality."

Don't restrict your choice to tables that match your bedroom furniture. While this can give a unified and cohesive look, mixing and matching styles and designs is equally popular now, and set beside a plain-styled bed or upholstered bedhead an individually chosen bedside table will add character.

Before you buy, check the table height is appropriate for your bed. As a guide the



top of the unit should not be lower than the top of the mattress.

If you like reading in bed ensure that the height of the bedside lamp on your table will be appropriate to the table height.

SLIM & STYLISH

If you're design conscious you'll be bang-on-trend with a walnut bedside table, the Tortona from Ercol who are British furniture makers renowned for their design. It's priced £395.

New Heights Miri bedside table is from £349. In American black walnut it is a chic contemporary twist on a traditional style. (A matching Miri bed is from £995).

Instantly conjure light and sparkle in the boudoir by teaming up with Laura Ashley's Mirrored Venetian Side Table £275. It's Art Deco inspired, and could add a feeling of space to a small room.

If you love the luxurious rooms you've enjoyed in holiday hotels, John Lewis's Hotel range could appeal. It features slim, streamlined dark wood furniture which would suit an Eastern look. A bedside table, £195.

CLASSICALLY HANDSOME

Good looks and period romance – an irresistible combination – are both easy to conjure up with a bedside table from The Real Wood Furniture Company.

It uses eco-friendly sustainable woods and one of its top sellers is a antique-finish bedside table, from the Norfolk Collection. It has three drawers and is beautifully crafted in oak and burr oak.

This table does have quite a hefty price tag of £1,345 but you can match it to a headboard or make a statement with a four poster. If you're looking for traditional style and have a smaller budget, match yourself up with a Lille Bedside Chest from Willis & Gambier for £399.

BLOND & BEAUTIFUL

If you're hankering after something pale and interesting a couple of light wood Milton three-drawer chests from The Cotswold Company could be a perfect partnership. They're £499 for a pair.

Creating a light, airy atmosphere is easy if you echo Scandinavian or New England style with white painted furniture. The Cotswold Company has a white-painted Farmhouse chest for £149, while Willis & Gambier's attractive white Bedside Chest from the Winchester Collection is £259.

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Simple steps in kitchen

WHETHER you're improving your kitchen to sell your home or simply to enjoy it, these simple steps will transform it for a fraction of the cost of a new one.

An obvious starting point is the walls. If you have shabby paintwork, it pays to tidy it up. Hopefully, you'll still have some of the original paint left, in which case just give it a really good stir and apply it, though be prepared for the paint on the walls to have faded. If so, you need to repaint the whole room (unless the damage is in an inconspicuous place) using specialist kitchen and bathroom paint, which is moisture resistant and easy to wipe clean. If you're selling your home, stick to neutral colours.

If not, anything goes, though dark colours do nothing to improve small or dingy rooms. And don't forget to spruce up the woodwork as well: white is usually best.

Now look at the tiles - do they need freshening up? The most common problem is discoloured or mouldy grout. Try using a dedicated grout cleaner or sugar-soap spray (a great cleaning agent), but if this doesn't work, you need a grout pen (you can also get tiny brush applicators), which basically paints the grout and makes it look all fresh and new again. It's a little tricky perfecting a neat finish, so start in an inconspicuous place.

If some of the tiles are chipped or broken, carefully prize them out using a chisel or by drilling a hole in the middle, then scrape the adhesive off the wall and lay new tiles, providing you've got or can get some the same. Retiling the whole room, if necessary, is a much bigger job, but still



well within the grasp of many DIYers.

You may prefer to paint the tiles. To do so, clean them thoroughly with sugar soap or dedicated tile cleaner, rinse with clean water and allow to dry. Next, paint on a specialist tile primer and when that's dry, the topcoat (doing as many coats as the manufacturer recommends in both cases). For a neat, smooth finish, use a gloss roller (small and foam) rather than a paintbrush, which will leave brush marks.

The trouble with tile paint is that the tiles look a bit odd because the grout is painted too, though you could try using a grout pen on it afterwards, or using white tile paint so the tiles and grout naturally merge.

Floors take quite a battering in the kitchen, and lino floors can easily become torn and tatty, which isn't a good look. While it's perfectly possible to fit a new piece yourself, if you don't feel confident about doing it, get a professional in instead.

A crucial part of any kitchen is the units - if these aren't right, nothing will look right. If you've got dated doors but the carcasses are sound, particularly if you're happy with the layout of the room, changing their appearance is easy.

One option is to replace the doors. Some DIY stores sell doors separately and so do specialist replacement door companies - look on the internet or in the weekend supplements for these.



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Time for a change...

THE world of interiors can be a little confusing sometimes, with the trends changing as rapidly as high street fashions.

That's fine if you've got the budget to indulge in every passing interior whim, but most of us really want a style that will have lasting appeal and doesn't cost a fortune.

Look no further than monochrome - a classic which looks just as good in rooms as it does in an outfit.

The black and white combo - accessorise with warm, chic touches of 'bling' gold or silver metallics to bring it bang up to date - is in the spotlight this autumn as designers celebrate its charms.

They're confidently predicting that it will be a leading look all through 2009 and beyond.

So how do you create monochrome magic? Leading interior designer, Karen Howes of THis Designs, says: "Black and white and cream are hot colours this season, however it is how you use them that's key. It's all about materials as well as colours, so go for polished steel, acrylic and plastic."

"Most importantly, before you start choosing fabrics and furniture decide which style you'd like to go for so you can plan a complete look."

There's a whole choice of interpretations from modern and minimal using pure white and jet black, a more rococo style with elaborate pattern and detail, or the glamorous Art Deco feel with mirrored pieces and shiny black surfaces.

"If you can't really afford a whole redesign but love the look - get savvy."



"Use inexpensive fabrics for large expanses such as curtains or loose covers and then have a mini-splurge on some fabulous designer cushions and accessories like vases."

BLACK AND WHITE RULES

The most versatile choice is white walls, or one black feature wall - in a glossy finish this is dramatic. In general, only the brave opt for all black walls!

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Timothy Hawkins' bespoke wooden furniture is carefully made by him and three craftsmen for his company 'Fine Furniture' in Bartestree. Tim is passionate about wood and attention to detail and quality are never compromised.

Sometimes pieces are designed entirely by Tim at the request of the customer, others by the customer themselves and he is prepared to make whatever piece of furniture you care to imagine. A recent commission of display cases for Hereford's Regimental Museum was well received. Tim and his craftsmen are skilled in making superb pieces in both traditional and contemporary styles using solid wood, whether of one kind or a combination of various woods.

Tim has almost thirty years of experience as a furniture

maker and his late grandfather and great-grandfather were ecclesiastical woodcarvers - Tim himself has previously made pieces for Hereford Cathedral and for various churches.

He is proud to be able to offer designs to suit everyone, from household furniture and corporate commissions to special pieces - perhaps a unique work of art, something to celebrate a forthcoming event or commemorate a past one.

For this year's 'Celebration of Craftsmanship & Design' exhibition in Cheltenham he made pieces based on three of Hereford's bridges.

Two of these sold immediately, but 'Wye Bridge' wine cabinet is still available and could be yours if you're quick enough!

Tim will be at the Malvern Autumn Show on Saturday the 27th & Sunday the 28th



of September, manning stand no. 284 and would be delighted to see you!

FACT FILE

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Furniture Making

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Perfect HOMES

in black and white

"Not so," says Anne Thompson, owner of House Couturier.

"Using very dark colours can give a luxurious appearance to a room. Rooms on a smaller scale are great areas to decorate with black and white - then get a dramatic effect with fabulous mirrors.

"I particularly like a flock wallpaper in black with white skirtings and ceiling, or a black feature wall behind a bed."

If that's not your thing, she suggests featuring the colour combination on the floor.

"A black and white floor can look dramatic. Whether it's a painted wooden floor, black and white vinyl tiles or a carpet or rug maybe edged with a fabulous black border - the contrasting colours help to set the scene."

Homebase's Boutique hotel range includes a snazzy wallpaper, Elinor - a floral pattern on a deep charcoal background, £19.99, while iconic 60s designer Barbara Hulanicki's Hula wallpaper in charcoal and gold is the authentic choice for retro lovers. It's £19.98 a roll from B&Q.

Marks & Spencer's Marcus rug in black and white, £159, is a particularly stylish choice from the excellent rug ranges in high street stores, or try Next and B&Q.

FILL THE SPACE

The strength of this look is that the simple contrast gives rooms a feeling of order and calm, so it's important that spaces aren't over-cluttered.

Select a few well-designed pieces of furniture, limit the selection of fabrics and accessories will bring the scheme to life.



Phil Kind, managing director of Sheerhome.co.uk, says: "I work with monochromes not because I know it's a fashion trend but because I believe a monochrome palette is best for the soul - well, the soul of your house! There's nothing to beat the elegant, chilled effect this colour scheme creates.

"Some people worry about it being a cold look but it needn't be if you use interesting monochrome prints or patterns on upholstered furniture."

Sheerhome's collection of monochrome homeware includes great statement pieces such as Bottna Double Tub Chairs, upholstered in a black and white fabric by renowned Finnish design house Marimekko, £549.99.

Littlewoods Direct has two classics in its

range - a Metropole high gloss sideboard, £189 (but be prepared to get handy with a screwdriver) and its Madrid leather swivel chair, £199. Both are available in either black or white. Team with its framed black and white Beatles photo, £40, for a full-on retro look.

Other stores have caught the craze. Bhs' range includes pieces such as a black sideboard in the Maison collection, £849, while you can create a snazzy dining room in an instant with Homebase's Samantha floral dining chairs, £149.99 for a pair.

But if expense is no object the DONO sofa, from Rolf Benz in white leather with walnut back rail, is a classy piece of monochrome kit. It's from £7,869 in leather, and £6,000 in fabric.

SPLASH OUT ON MONOCHROME

Some argue that black and white's clean, sharp simplicity is best used in bathrooms and kitchens. Marble worktops or glass splashbacks in kitchens or black marble with white tiles in bathrooms aren't just bang on-trend, they're also super practical and there are so many sales at the moment it could be a good time for a revamp.

"The international fashion catwalks have been awash with monochrome designs for 08/09 and this strong theme is mirrored in interiors so the trend for black in bathrooms continues to grow," says Cheryl Gurner, director and creative head at Bathrooms International.

"The latest 'must have' bathrooms suites come in a block colour of black which makes a real statement."

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An easy way to a flawless floor...

NOTHING beats a tiled floor, particularly in the bathroom or kitchen, but not everyone has the time, patience, money or skills to lay one.

A much quicker and cheaper alternative is sheet vinyl flooring. Vinyl is ideal for kitchens and bathrooms because it's water-resistant, easy to clean and hard-wearing.

It's also not necessarily the poor relation to tiles – you can get some nice vinyls that will look good for years to come, if fitted properly. Here's how:

- The sub-floor. This is crucial to how good the end result will look and should be clean, dry and as stable and flat as you can get it. If the sub-floor is concrete, use cement mortar to fill any cracks or holes and allow the repairs to dry thoroughly. An uneven floor can be improved by using a self-levelling floor compound, available from DIY stores.

If, on the other hand, the sub-floor is floorboards, knock any protruding nails down with a hammer and nail punch. Nail or, better still, screw down any loose



boards, checking there are no wires or pipes where you're going to screw.

Once the floorboards are secure, cover with hardboard so you have a good surface on which to lay the vinyl.

- Once you've bought your vinyl, leave it in a warm room for at least a day because this will make it easier to lay. When you're ready to lay it, start by unrolling it – the room should be clear before you begin – leaving 5cm or more excess all round the edge of the room.

If there are any large areas where the vinyl will be wasted, such as a fireplace hearth, roughly cut round them now, again allowing at least 5cm excess, so you don't have to deal with lots of extra vinyl.

You can also do the corners at this stage – cut down along the edge of each corner through the excess vinyl to the floor. Now you can cut the vinyl to fit along the walls.

Take a block of wood and use it to press the vinyl into a crease along the bottom of the skirting boards. You can then trim off the excess neatly with a sharp craft knife.

If, at any point, you cut the vinyl too short, either pull some over from the other side of the room, if you can, or hide your mistake with a piece of beading, which you can secure to the skirting board as you would with laminate flooring.

- Objects like the loo and bathroom basin pedestal are trickier. To fit the flooring round these, cut down, as you did at the room's corners, from the top of the excess vinyl to the floor every 7-8cm. Once you've made cuts all round the object, trim round the bottom of the cuts to make a neat edge.

- When you've finished all the cutting, leave the vinyl for a few days to settle into place, then stick it securely at the doorways with vinyl tape. For a neat edge and to prevent the vinyl being torn, fit a metal threshold strip to cover the join between the vinyl and the flooring on the other side of the door. This can be screwed or glued (on concrete) in place but, if screwing, use a detector to check for wires and pipes underneath.



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Blu Ray brings hi-def entertainment home

MANY of us can remember the format wars of the 80s when VHS went head-to-head with Betamax. Much money was spent on ownership of these fairly hefty machines and plenty of people were left a little red-faced after backing the wrong box.

It has been happening all over again. This time it is Blu Ray versus HD DVD, with both discs offering an eye pleasing visual display on your HD ready televisions.

But only one can be victorious and it would appear Blu Ray has the upper hand.

The world's largest "adult entertainment" company chose the format for its productions, Warner Brothers are on board and Woolworths are only putting this type of disc on their shelves.

This would indicate the battle may be almost over and, here, we bring you six of the best players to bring high-definition entertainment into your home.

● **LG BH200: £899.95 at bigpockets.co.uk**
No doubt at all this is a pretty hefty price tag, but this machine can play both disc formats, which could be of real benefit for film fanatics. As the unfavoured format declines in popularity, the discs will be discounted, so you could end up with a fairly hefty collection for much less.

● **Sony Vaio VGN-Ar series: from £1,799 at sonystyle.co.uk**

In the league of laptops this is most cer-

tainly at the premiership end of the price tags, but you'll be in a small minority of folk watching high definition films whilst out and about.

This laptop is a computing powerhouse, showing off all that is good in portable PCs to tempt us into wallet opening mode – 500GB hard drive is my final word, that'll have the geeks' attention at least.

● **PS3: £299.99 from argos.co.uk**

Looking to justify your purchase of a console gaming system? Look no further. This fine machine produces the finest images on your high definition TV set of some of the best games ever made.

The justification comes in the form of the PS3's ability to play Blu Ray discs too, making it possibly the most cost-effective option available.

● **Sony BDPS300: £299.95 from richer-sounds.com**

A superb standalone player in every way. Grab one from this website and treat yourself to six free discs too.

● **Philips BDP7100: £447 from pixmania.com**

This premium machine offers up a vast array of added features to its standard Blu Ray disc playing abilities.

Set this one up with a surround sound system and it can support up to seven speakers.

● **Samsung BDP 1000: £329.99 at amazon.co.uk**

This excellent machine features a multi memory card slot for viewing video footage and digital imagery on your TV set too.

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A NEATLY trimmed hedge tidies up the whole garden, as does a well-kept lawn. Hedges can also work wonders sectioning off areas so there's a surprise around every corner.

Of course, the effect that hedging can create largely depends on its maintenance and if you have a privet or other fast-growing hedge such as the evergreen honeysuckle *Lonicera nitida*, it will probably need a trim now to keep it looking its best.

Conifer hedges, including the notoriously fast-growing *leylandii*, which grows impossibly tall if left unchecked, are nevertheless excellent hedging plants if they are regularly trimmed.

You may have to clip conifer hedges three times during the summer, with the first cut in May (but watch out that you don't disturb any nesting birds) and the last in late summer, clipping to the desired shape and stopping the leading shoot at the desired height.

Box and yew can be clipped in May to keep the edges sharp and then given a second trim in late August or early September.

If you start trimming conifers when they are small, long before they reach the height and width you require, you will build up a healthy, thick layer of leafy growth over the entire surface of the hedge.

If you are trimming a formal hedge, stretch a level string between two upright posts as a guide to height.

Be aware that falling off a ladder is the most common gardening accident, so if



the hedge is taller than shoulder height you'll need a sturdy stepladder and preferably someone to hold it for you while you trim.

Alternatively you could invest in a proper hedge-clipping platform to stand on. Make sure you don't trip over any loose cable if you're using electric hedge clippers.

Start clipping at one end, starting at the base and working your way up, covering about 1m (3ft) at a time. Leave the top until last, which makes it easier to get it completely level. Try to make the sides slope in slightly so the base is slightly wider at the bottom, to avoid creating shade that kills the base of the plant.

When you reach the end of the hedge,

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Car parking has been much improved. In addition-a huge new covered area (specifically designed for the centre), has been added for the protection of plants, and provides a nice environment in which to shop, out of the effects of the weather.

Due to the increased space gained from the covered area new product ranges will be added over the coming months.

Within the main building (a former "engine shed" previous belonging to Great Western Railways), you will find a range of garden

sundries and garden related gifts.

Shortly the whole interior will be dressed up with Xmas decorations and the undercover area will be packed with Xmas plants sourced from Italy and Holland as well as the U.K.

The Store prides itself on the quality of its plants and its staff are always available for help and advice.

If you are looking for inspiration or for something just a little bit different-look no further - a gift wrapping service is also offered.

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	Ross Garden Store	Garden Centre	01989 568999	sales@rossgardenstore.co.uk
	Manager >	Established >	Web address >	Location >
	Jane Fishwick	April 2006	www.rossgardenstore.co.uk	The Engine Shed Ashburton Ind. Est. Ross-on-Wye

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stay neat and tidy



remove the template, posts and string, trim the ends of the hedge neatly and tidy up any bits you may have missed.

If you want to shape your hedge at the top you can make a shaping frame or template from a piece of plywood, which is especially useful when shaping a hedge in its early years. Place it over the hedge and cut following the lines of the template, moving along the hedge as you go.

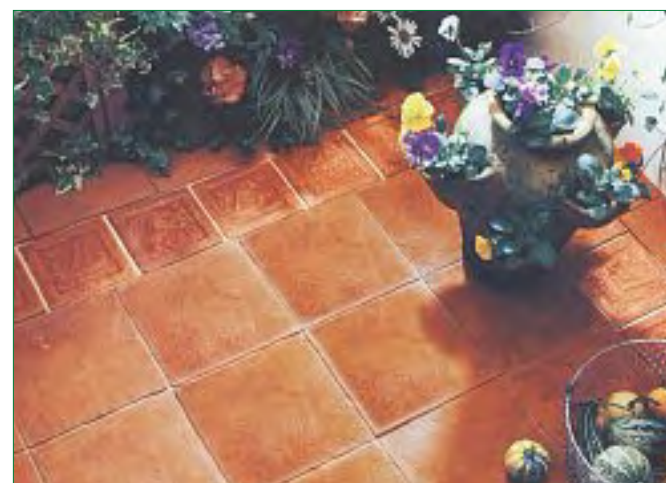
Of course, tools are also all-important. I

have several small, waist-height hedges in my garden which I can trim by eye and for these I use the rechargeable battery-powered Bosch Isio Shape and Edge (RRP £49.99), a handy little cordless trimmer with two blades - one for edging and the other for trimming shrubs and small hedges.

Available in most DIY stores and garden centres, it's one of the most useful power tools I possess.

If you have a massive hedge, power hedge-clippers with a long blade will be needed. Electric types are great provided the cable will reach far enough, or you could go for a petrol model which doesn't involve any cable, but these are much heavier to use.

If you dread the thought of all the clippings you will have to sweep up, try laying a dust sheet underneath the hedge to save time and trouble.



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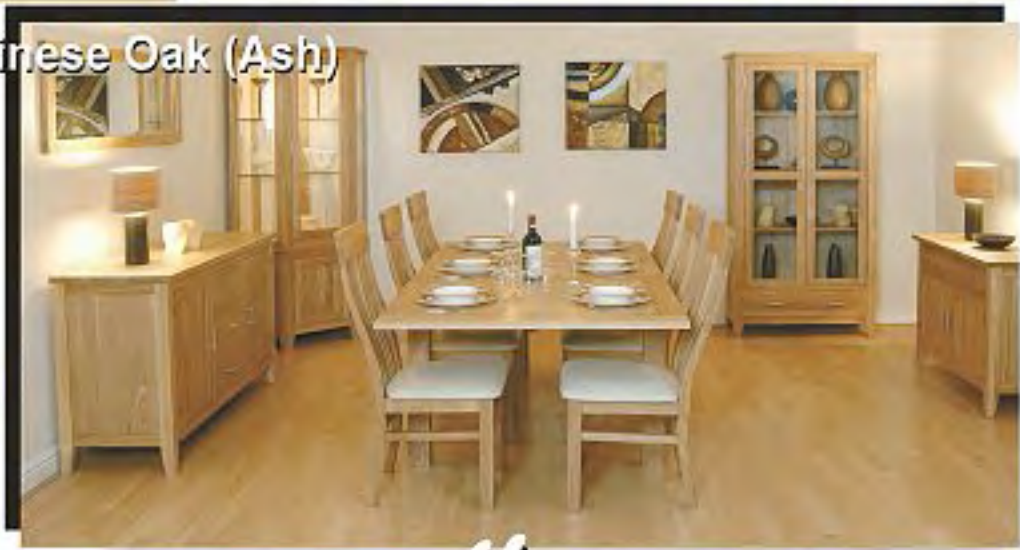
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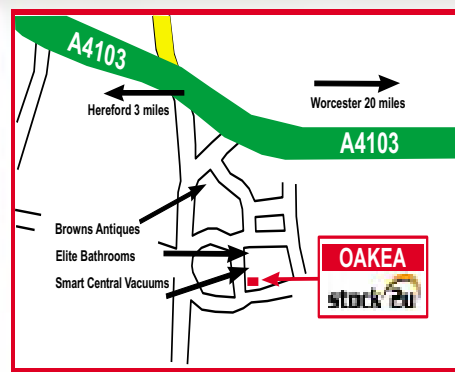
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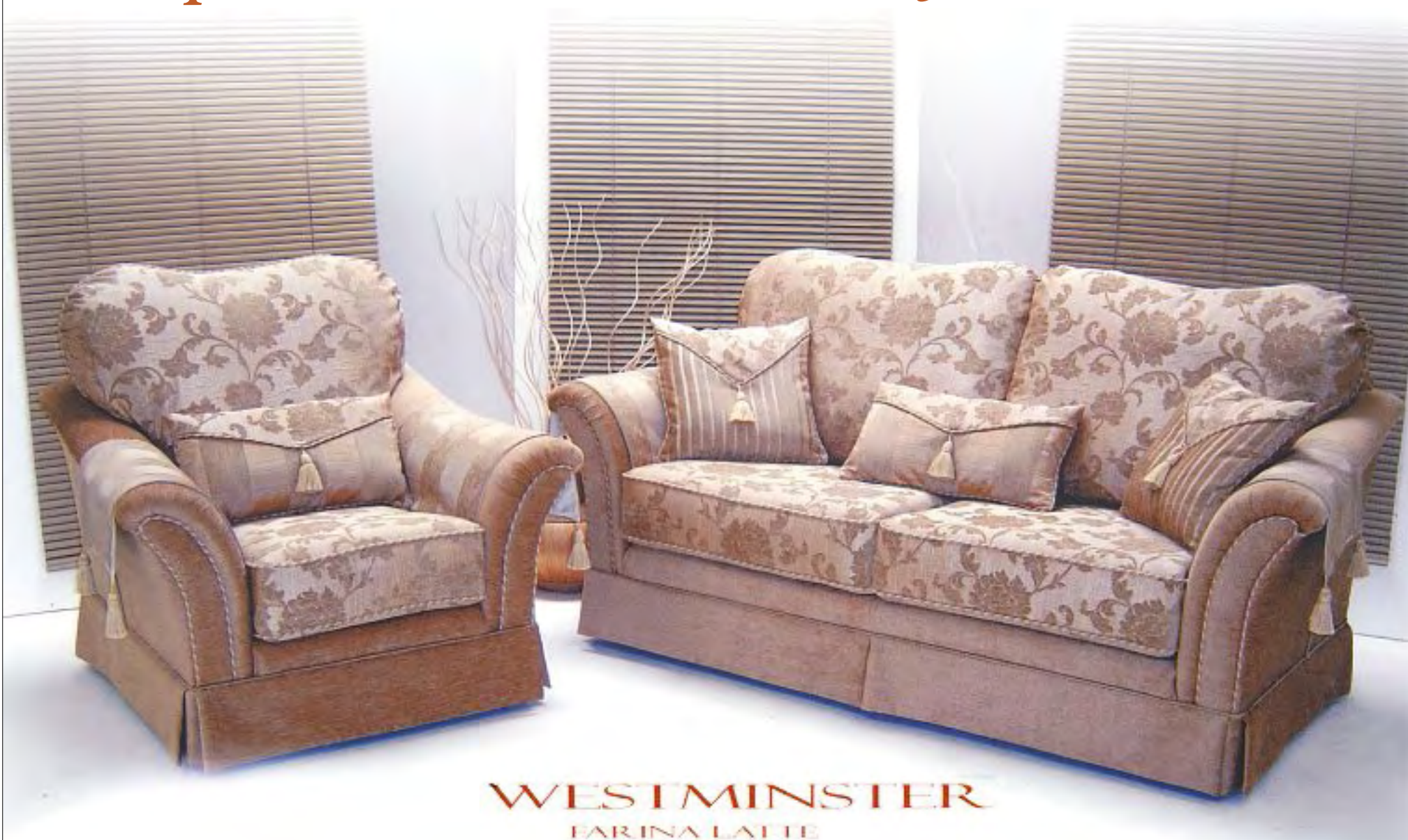
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