

YOUR HOME

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TIPS AND TRENDS TO HELP MAXIMIZE HOME BUYING AND SELLING



Gareth Brown/Jupiter Images

Feng Shui, Take Me Away

Done right, a bathroom can be a quick escape from the rush and stress of everyday life. And turning this room into an urban oasis doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg. If you're starting from scratch or remodeling a bathroom, the design experts at HGTV suggest a flowing floor plan that blends from one area to the next. You may even want to consider the principles of feng shui, the Chinese art of placement, which focuses on creating a positive flow of energy in the home.

While sections may be distinct, the bathroom should not feel divided. Ideally, the bathtub should be placed near a window so you can peer out into nature while soaking in the tub. The view looking in and out of the bathroom should be appealing, and the toilet area should be kept hidden from the doorway.

Other suggestions include using neutral colors such as sand, taupe, brown, gray, sea green and black for a feeling of serenity. The materials you use in your bathroom should balance the five elements of fire, earth, water, metal and air. Blend copper faucets and stone sinks with airy rice paper screens. Bamboo laminate countertops and teak wood add a touch of Zen and don't require major remodeling. In fact, you can simply add a teak stool to the shower and teak floor mats outside the tub.

FIRE Power

Fireplaces have irresistible appeal. Just picturing a fireplace conjures feelings of warmth and coziness. Even in warmer climates where people don't rely on them for heat, fireplaces add charm, character and value — about \$12,000 per fireplace, according to the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® — to homes. They lend ambiance to just about any room, and with so many varieties and options available, it's easy to see why people want them.

If you don't have a fireplace in your home, it's easier than you might think to add one — without undergoing a complete remodel or major construction. Gas and electric models are more popular and affordable than ever and easy to install. And with so many options for every space and budget, the hardest part is choosing one that best suits your needs.

If you do have a fireplace in your home, whether it's the wood-burning, gas or electric variety, the most important factor is maintenance. Like cars, fireplaces need annual tune-ups. If you have a chimney-based fireplace — traditional wood-burning or top-vent gas — you should have a certified chimney sweep inspect and clean the chimney at least once a year or after approximately 80 fires. It's also a good idea to have a certified service technician come out once a year to inspect other types of gas fireplaces and to replace bulbs on electric units.



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The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Energy Efficient Mortgages Program helps homebuyers and homeowners save money on utility bills by enabling them to finance the cost of adding energy-efficient features to new or existing homes as part of their FHA-insured home purchase or refinancing mortgage.



Source: www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/sfh/eem/energy-r.cfm



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Safety Patrol

As the weather outside gets frightful in some parts of the country, heading indoors sounds delightful. But staying warm inside is not without its hazards. According to the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA), heating equipment is the leading cause of home fires during December, January and February. Portable and space heaters

can be especially dangerous. To make sure you and your family stay safe and warm this winter, consider these tips from NFPA:

- When buying a new space heater, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing laboratory and is legal for use in your community.
- Plug your electric-powered space heater into an outlet with sufficient capacity — never into an extension cord.
- Use the proper grade of the proper fuel for your liquid-fueled space heater, and never use gasoline in any heater not approved for gasoline use. Refuel only in a well-ventilated area and when the equipment is cool.
- Turn off space heaters in unoccupied rooms and when you go to bed; portable space heaters are easy to knock over in the dark.
- Do not use your oven to heat your home.

- Make sure fuel-burning equipment is vented to the outside, that the venting is kept clear and unobstructed and that the exit point is properly sealed around the vent. All of these measures keep deadly carbon monoxide from building up in the home.
- Test smoke alarms monthly; install a carbon monoxide alarm in a central location outside each sleeping area.
- Inspect all heating equipment annually and clean as necessary.



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