



Smart Choices

Our design panel spotlights 12 innovative ways to enhance your home. by **Lauren Payne**

WHAT ARE THE BEST NEW IDEAS for New Jersey homes? That's the question we asked nine award-winning New Jersey interior designers—all members of the American Society of Interior Designers—during a recent luncheon and round table at the Bernards Inn in Bernardsville. The 2½-hour discussion resulted in a list of 12 must-have products and ideas. Some are groundbreaking and state-of-the-art products; some are cool new concepts. Others are tried-and-true, but tweaked and improved. All will ultimately make your home life sparkle.

The 2012 design panel, clockwise from top left: Beth Insabella Walsh, Insabella Designs, Little Silver; Karla Trincanello, Interior Decisions, Florham Park; Diane Durocher, Diane Durocher Interiors, Ramsey; Ivey Fromkin, I. Fromkin Interiors, Monmouth Beach; Anna Maria Mannarino, Mannarino Designs, Holmdel; Virginia Zonfrilli, VHZ Design Group, South Orange; Sheila Rich, Sheila Rich Interiors, Monmouth Beach; and Kingsley Knauss, KBK Interior Design, Westfield.

WIRELESS SOUND SYSTEMS

FOR ANY FAMILY THAT LOVES MUSIC, wireless whole-house sound systems such as that from Sonos (sonos.com) solve a world of problems. "They're incredibly affordable and easy to use," Ginny Zonfrilli said. Just how easy? Download your music to an MP3 player, then create playlists. Listen to Rachmaninoff in the kitchen and Rihanna in the family room at the same time. You can synchronize one song to play throughout the entire house or a different song in each room. Since it's wireless, no installation is necessary; one router connects the music source to wireless speakers in every room.



LOW-VOC PAINTS

NEW JERSEY-BASED PAINT giant Benjamin Moore (benjaminmoore.com) was among the first to offer paints low in VOCs—volatile organic compounds—which are believed to be toxic. The company's new water-based alkyd formula, Advance, acts like a traditional oil paint, but with low-VOCs, minimal odor and soap-and-water cleanup. "Homeowners don't want to give up the benefits of oil-based paint," Kingsley Knauss said. "Advance looks and acts like oil paint."

ACOUSTIC COVERINGS

OUR DESIGN PANEL WENT GAGA when Diane Durocher pulled a wall-covering sample from her bag. "This is a great alternative to upholstering a wall," Durocher said. Made in France by Elitis (elitis.fra), the product minimizes sound, comes in four textures and can be painted. Elitis is sold by the yard and is available only through your interior designer.



PHOTOS: PORTRAIT—JOE POLLICIO; PRODUCTS—COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS

RECYCLED, RECLAIMED

MANUFACTURERS ACROSS VIRTUALLY all product lines have embraced the need to create environmentally friendly products. From reclaimed-wood flooring to recycled-glass tiles, choices for the home can help our environment. "Kudos to all the manufacturers who have gotten on board," said Sheila Rich. One favorite example: A doormat made from 100 percent recycled drink bottles. Technically a commercial-grade product, the Eco Berber floor mats in the Waterhog Eco Line by Andersen (andersenco.com) "look good and feel good," Rich said. The company estimates that every square foot of the floor mat eliminates four half-liter bottles from the waste stream. The mats come in an assortment of colors and can be customized with a family crest, welcome greeting or slogan.



Eco-friendly



LIFESTYLE FABRICS

FOR YEARS, SUNBRELLA (sunbrella.com) has been making outdoor fabrics that are stain and mildew resistant. Now the company has moved inside the home—with style. "These products are absolutely wonderful," Karla Trincanello said. "Families are loving them. There's no more, 'Uh-oh, I got ketchup on the sofa.' The stains come right off." In addition to Sunbrella, dozens of companies are offering stain-resistant—even washable—fabrics. "Today every fabric showroom has their own similar product: Donghia, Kravit, Scalandre, Schumacher, Pollack," Ivey Fromkin said. "The selections are endless." Added Sheila Rich: "They're lifestyle fabrics...pretty and practical."

WATER FEATURES

WITH THE CONTINUING TREND of cocooning—creating a relaxing, natural haven inside the home—elements of nature are finding their way into our living rooms. "I used to cringe when people would say they want to incorporate an aquarium into their living room," Karla Trincanello said. "I'd think of the pumps, the filters." Not anymore. Trincanello brought images of a favorite find: an aquarium coffee table. Fully encased with no visible pumps or filters, these aquarium tables by Midwest Tropical (midwest-tropical.com)—which also designs waterfalls, fountains and other water features—are custom-made from a strong cast acrylic that gives it more clarity than glass. "They're sculptural," Trincanello said. Added Sheila Rich, "Watching the fish is so calming. This is wonderful for a residential setting."



DIGITAL IMAGERY

"DIGITAL IMAGERY has become spot-on," said Beth Insabella Walsh, referring to creating patterns on fabrics, tiles, wall coverings and more. "The faux looks are unbelievable." With digital imaging, any surface can pack a punch with a realistic image. You want a giant wave on your surfer-son's bedroom wall? Use digital technology to create a vivid mural. You want ceramic tile with a wood-plank look on the pool deck? Digital technology will fool the eye; only bare feet will know. "It's an exciting category and it fits all budgets," Insabella Walsh said. Some favorites: imagnetile.com and muralsyourway.com.



INTEGRATED KITCHEN COMPONENTS



THE NEWEST KITCHENS CAN BE SEAMLESS works of art in which it's unclear where the cabinets end and the refrigerator begins. These integrated kitchens are clean looking and clutter free. "People are looking to have their counters clean of small appliances, and large appliances hidden, flush with the cabinetry," Karla Trinacanello said. "Basically, we show off our stoves but very little else." The news is that the integrated look is now available in nearly all price ranges, not just the high end. "SubZero has been doing it for a long time," said Kingsley Knauss. "Now others are doing it, too, at all ends of the market." Some favorites: siematic.com and snaidero.com.

AN INTERESTING ADVANCE IN LIGHTING TECHNOLOGY is adhesive strip lighting, or linear lighting. Similar to tape, linear lighting can be applied inside a cabinet, framing a picture or under the kitchen counter. The product is flexible, adjustable and a snap to install. "It can be molded to fit virtually anywhere," Ginny Zonfrilli said. Added Kingsley Knauss, "It has a lot of applications and it's very affordable." The bulbs can be incandescent, xenon or LED. Seagull Lighting (seagulllighting.com) is a leader in the field.

LINEAR LIGHTING



DECORATIVE FIREPLACES



MANUFACTURED FIREPLACES "aren't so kitschy anymore," said Anna Maria Manarino. "They're built-in, flush with the wall, modern and decorative." One system from New York-based Hearth Cabinet (hearthcabinet.com) uses an alcohol fuel cartridge, eliminating the need for a gas line, flue or chimney. The unit can be installed on any wall. The alcohol cartridge lasts about two hours and can be recycled. Though they have real flames these fireplaces don't give off much heat and are primarily decorative.

SMART TECHNOLOGY

THE SMARTPHONE has changed how we handle many aspects of daily life. But how does that translate to the home? The answer is home automation, which allows homeowners to control an array of systems—climate, security, lighting and sound—remotely from a smartphone. For instance, homeowners can turn on the lights, raise the window shades and ramp up the heat on the way home from work. What's new is that these systems have become so user-friendly. "With earlier systems you felt you needed to take a seminar to learn how it works," Ginny Zonfrilli said. "Now you download an app. It's that simple." A favorite product is Prodigy, a home-automation system from New Jersey-based Crestron (crestron.com), a leader in the field. The system starts at about \$3,000.

LED HAS REVOLUTIONIZED the lighting industry—and it keeps getting better. "It's responsible for every change, whether it's based on energy conservation or based on bulb longevity," said Ginny Zonfrilli. When LED lighting entered the marketplace, it wasn't dimmable and the color saturation wasn't great. But quality has improved and bulb longevity has increased—there are

LED LIGHTING

LED lightbulbs that last for 35 years—and product options are plentiful. A favorite is a square, recessed light fixture that has no bulky housing. The



Eco-friendly

fixture is bled right into the wallboard for a clean, sophisticated look. The product: Aurora by Pure Lighting (purelighting.com/products).