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SUMMER 2014

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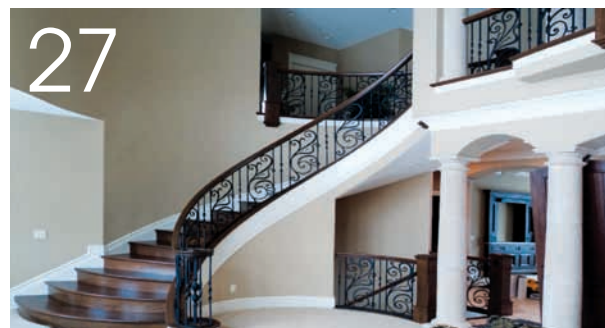
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LANSING



May 9, 2014

O'Keefe Publishing, Inc./dba J.B. Printing  
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SUBJECT: O'Keefe Publishing, Inc./dba J.B. Printing, Kalamazoo, Michigan

I am pleased to inform you that your request for Clean Corporate Citizen (C3) designation for O'Keefe Publishing, Inc./dba J.B. Printing is approved. O'Keefe Publishing, Inc./dba J.B. Printing has exemplified corporate environmental responsibility through its efforts to maintain, protect, and enhance Michigan's environmental resources. As a C3, we challenge you to be a model for others in your industry to emulate.

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Dan Wyant  
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# Celebrate the Summer

## Martini's Orecchiette Pasta with Sausage & Broccoli

Photography by Linda Hoard

The summer has finally arrived and we have the longing for the warmth of the sun, the camaraderie of our friends, and the satisfaction a great meal can give. Martini's is just the ticket. What began as a pizzeria over twenty years ago, Martini's has transitioned to a neighborhood restaurant serving simple, rustic Italian food, including pizza. The patio surrounded by beautiful and fragrant gardens makes it the perfect retreat in the midst of the hustle and bustle of your day.

To Chef Marlon Manty, creating recipes for the restaurant is an art form, as the recipes are a feast for the eye as well as the palate. The Orecchiette Pasta, pictured, for example, is an explosion of taste as well as colors. You will never tire of the menu, as they have an amazing array of appetizers, soups, salads, sandwiches, pastas and entrees, and Chef Manty will never make the same Soupe du Jour twice. And of course, there is the pizza with no end of variations.

Every morning begins the ritual of making the pizza dough from scratch and preparing all the raw, fresh ingredients. To Chef Manty and owners Rick Schiavo and Rich Munda, using the season's local ingredients are key to making Martini's not just a neighborhood restaurant, but a destination.

### Orecchiette Pasta with Sausage & Broccoli

- 1 pound Orecchiette pasta (cooked el dente)
- 2 pounds hot Italian sausage
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion
- 8 roasted roma tomatoes (skins removed)
- 2 cups blanched broccoli
- 1 cup Grana Padano cheese, grated
- 10 red chile flakes
- salt and pepper to taste

In a large saute pan, brown the sausage after it has been removed from the casing. When fully cooked, remove from the pan and save the oil. To the reserved oil, add the olive oil and saute the yellow onion. Season with the chili flakes. When the onion is almost transparent, return the sausage to the pan with the remaining ingredients. Saute for two minutes, season with salt and pepper, and slowly toss in 3/4 cup cheese. When finished, garnish with the remaining cheese.



Jorden and Branden DeHaan with their father, DRS founder, Robert DeHaan

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# Door Walls – Opening up Doors to the Outdoors

By Zolton Cohen

**T**he purpose of a door wall,” says Marla Bruemmer, owner and designer at Design Evolutions, “is to connect people on the inside with what is on the outside of a house - so you can make that outdoor area a part of your home.”

A relatively new development, door walls are predominantly used out West and in the South, Bruemmer says. However, she notes, “I see them growing in popularity in the Midwest. More people are asking for them.”

Their unhurried infiltration into the market locally might be the result of environmental conditions found in the Midwest that aren’t issues in other regions. Bruemmer says, “Door walls work in certain locations really well, like Arizona, where you don’t have a lot of bugs or extreme temperature changes. They are a wonderful design tool; imagine opening up an entire wall up to a pool and patio area. But issues come up, and bugs are certainly one of them.” In addition, because of the many sliding or hinged elements on the doors, it is difficult to achieve adequate air sealing to keep out cold winter air.

So, Bruemmer says, “Instead of using a door wall to go directly to the outdoors as you see out West, a good use for them here is to put them between two interior spaces, for instance from a kitchen into a sunroom, a covered or protected area, or a screened-in porch. The space the door wall leads into does not necessarily need to be heated. But let’s make it like a vestibule; somewhere that is protected from the elements.”

Door walls represent a major investment in money, and sometimes floor space. Because the opening in the wall is so large, a sizable header needs to be installed in order to transfer the weight of the overlying floor or roof down to the home’s foundation. Bruemmer says that bigger openings might even require the use of a steel beam to support the load.



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Some door walls are designed to open and close like a bypass door. Others fold up one panel against another, like an accordion. "Bypass doors," Bruemmer says, "might have better sealing potential. But, like a pocket door, if you have several door panels sliding by one another, you have to allot an extra wide space in the wall to accommodate those panels. The bigger the opening, the more panels, which means you're going to have a thicker wall. So it's not something that is easy to put in if you don't have the room."

Door walls are definitely a luxury item, Bruemmer says. "People like the look of them. But there is a lot involved in putting one in, and that can drive up the price. But there are ways to install them to get a good result. You need to be a good consumer and decide what your goal is. They can be dramatic and you can create some amazing drama with them; some fabulous detail - if you're willing to pay the price to do it right."

#### AN ALTERNATIVE "DOOR WALL" FOR ANOTHER TYPE OF BUDGET

On the other end of the 'large opening in a wall' spectrum, Al Whitaker, Vice President at Overhead Door Company of Kalamazoo, has a different idea. His company carries several products that enable a homeowner to turn a garage into a bug-free living space.

Those products are vinyl roll-down and aluminum pull-down screen doors that allow in light and ventilation while excluding insects.

Whitaker says, "This trend started in the South, where people said, 'you know, let's keep the bugs out of here; we want to use this space.' A garage can be converted into a screened-in porch, to make it a living area. For some homeowners it's their doghouse; their man cave."

While garage door screening products were initially developed for commercial purposes, Whitaker has seen increasing interest from homeowners. "If you've got decent weather it's a real nice option, and it is kind of working its way up north here. We get inquiries about them during the springtime, especially during the Home Show."

"It is one of the cheapest ways of adding livable space to your home," Whitaker says. "With all the amenities people are adding to their garages, like epoxy floors and nice cabinets, I picture



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a retired guy who has everything in place and doesn't have kids at home anymore messing things up, and it's a nice, clean environment. It's nice that you can have the overhead door open and still keep breezes blowing through and the bugs out."

Roll up garage screen doors can be retrofitted to existing garages, and feature a spring-assisted lifting mechanism and pull-up handles; wider doors have wind bars that give the screen greater stability. "The apparatus mounts above the garage door and is quite small," Whitaker says. "It's a fabric that rolls up and it can be cut to whatever width is needed at no price premium."

"These units last a long time because people use them only when the weather is fair. They don't get a lot of up and down cycles, and they aren't much exposed to weather and sun. If you don't hit it, it is a remarkably durable product."



Photo courtesy of Overhead Door & Lifestyle Screens





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# Creating a rain garden for beauty and function

By Zinta Aistars

We live in a sloped and graded world. Rooftops on houses are pitched, sidewalks are sloped, while landscaping is graded to allow rainwater to follow gravity away from building foundations. No one wants a leaky basement or a mushy lawn. In the minds of builders and engineers, all that sloping and grading made sense.

In recent years, homeowners and builders are taking another look at what happens to rainwater runoff.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, as much as 70 percent of all water pollution is caused by rainwater runoff. The water that runs off rooftops and lawns carries sediment, oils, road salt, trash, bacteria, along with pesticides sprayed on lawns and various toxic chemicals from building materials and automobiles, and even heat.

"Runoff can create flooding, and it adds pollutants to our streams and lakes and eventually larger bodies of water," says Dave Wendling, president of the nonprofit organization, the Kalamazoo Area Chapter of Wild Ones (KAWO). KAWO is part of a national movement for natural landscaping using native plants.

Rain gardens, Wendling says, can be an easy and attractive solution to rainwater runoff. A retired physician, Wendling lives on 15 acres near Texas Township, where he grows native plants—plants that grew in the area prior to European settlement—and maintains a rain garden.

"A rain garden can be as meticulous or as casual as you like," he says. "Look for a natural low spot in your yard, maybe an area leading from your down spout, where water naturally tends to pool."

Rain gardens, he explains, are shallow depressions surrounded by a berm with loose soil and plants, preferably native, which collect and help water to soak into the ground rather than run off. The soil works as a filter that cleans harmful sediment from the water as it seeps into the ground.

Nicole Craig, a consultant for Kalamazoo County Drain Commissioner Pat Crowley, has been working with the commissioner's office for several years. "We're interested in promoting ways to capture and clean rain and stormwater in Kalamazoo," she says. "It's much more economical to prevent

the problems caused by runoff than to try to repair the damage to water systems later."

Rain gardens, Craig says, are an excellent way to prevent that kind of damage. The Drain Commissioner's office, along with Kalamazoo County Land Bank Authority, Kalamazoo County Foundation, and several other area organizations and landscaping businesses, have been working across the county to help homeowners and businesses construct rain gardens.

"Our goal is to make it as easy as possible for people to build rain gardens," says Craig. For the most part, she says, "there are no zoning issues in the Kalamazoo city code on constructing these gardens, as long as you keep them about 10 feet away from your foundation and consider underground utilities wherever you dig. If you want to plant on that portion of turf between the sidewalk and the street, however, a permit may be required. Check with the Kalamazoo County Road Commission or whoever owns that curb lawn."



*Photo courtesy of Ruth Caputo*

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with a native grass mix. Native plants are always best, because they have a longer root system that helps water drain into the soil. They also resist drought and other climate changes."

Caputo welcomes questions about building rain gardens at [info@kalamazoowildones.org](mailto:info@kalamazoowildones.org).



*Photo courtesy of Ruth Caputo*

Actual installation of a rain garden need not take long, says Kelly Jordan, landscape designer at Murray Landscaping. Most requests for these gardens come from residential areas where houses are built close together and puddles develop between houses.

"Evaluate the area where you want your garden," says Jordan. "You will want to plant different kinds of plants for sunny or shady areas. You'll want to determine how fast the area drains, how long it will hold water—the soil type—and gauge its slope. If you mostly just want it to be functional, you can place stones and a tree in that area. If beauty is your goal, you can fill it with flowers and ferns."

The typical rain garden, Jordan says, spans about 10 feet by 20 feet and is between 4 to 8 inches deep. A rain garden in sandy soils should be approximately 20 percent of the size of the drainage area, 30 percent for silty or loamy soils, and 60 percent in clay soils.

Ruth Caputo, a retired chemist, a master gardener and chair of KAWO, lives in a high-end Portage development. While she needed to fill out a couple of applications with the city government for her rain garden in a yard of wood and grassland, her neighbors have been pleased with the results.

"There's a cultural shift in how people are seeing yards," she says. They appreciate the added benefit of the birds and butterflies attracted to the garden.

"Before I put in the rain garden, water gathered there naturally," she says. "I planted native shrubs around the area

Helpful links to learn more about rain gardens:

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# A HOME FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE ABOUT PEOPLE

By Kaye Bennett  
Photography by Zolton Cohen

In April 2013, the Fillar family was happily ensconced in the Rudgate neighborhood in Portage, in a house they'd help build and had lived in for 14 years. They loved the neighborhood and had no intention of moving. Their three daughters, now in their teens and early 20s, would be moving on in a few years, so they did not need a bigger house. But then. . .

One day Kennedy Fillar had an epiphany. He came home and said to his wife Valerie, "Honey, I think it's time to move."

It was obviously a move that was fated to be. . . just not quite the way the Fillars envisioned it.

"We were not looking to build," says Kennedy. "We wanted an existing house." But every home they looked at needed a lot of remodeling, they remember, and, "We didn't want to rebuild something."

Their realtor, Bill Evenboer of Evenboer-Walton Realtors, took them to the Huntington Hills neighborhood in Mattawan, to take a look at a new house, but looking at the houses and the vacant lots in the community convinced them: "We almost instantly decided that maybe it was worth building again," Kennedy says.

That's when things started happening very fast. Kennedy and one of their daughters found a lot and ". . . had the vision," he says. Evenboer put the Fillars in contact with Todd Roberts, owner of Roberts Built Homes, in Kalamazoo, who had built a half dozen of the houses in Huntington Hills, and whose work the Fillars had admired in a Parade of Homes house.



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Roberts said he first received the call from the Fillars in May, and they asked him for something similar to other homes he'd built in the neighborhood, but with several modifications and upgrades. With a dad who was a painter (the family owned AJ Decorating in Kalamazoo), design was in Valerie Fillar's genes, and she wanted to be deeply involved in the process. That was fine with Todd Roberts, who says his business is currently about 70 percent spec homes and about 30 percent custom-builts, but that he'd like to switch those percentages around. "I like dealing with customers from the start," he says.

Having decided on a builder, the Fillars put their Rudgate house on the market and it sold within three days, always an impetus to speed up the building process.

It was a six-month project, from ground-breaking in June till move-in in November, a speedy process, given the house's almost 3,300-square-foot size, not to mention the 1,300 square feet of finished basement. And the Fillars couldn't be happier with the final product. Their new home has everything the family has always dreamed of, including a lot of space for their large, extended family.



The open floor plan, the large bedrooms and bathrooms, and the basement area and outdoor decks allow them to host their friends, their daughters' friends, and their many relatives (Kennedy has nine brothers and sisters, most of whom live in this area). The large dining room accommodates a long table made with reclaimed lumber from Great Britain; that plus a second table that can be set up nearby allow the Fillars to seat 30 people or so at family dinners. Through the holidays, they were able to house 20 overnight guests at a time.

Working with Roberts, Valerie had some specific things she wanted to incorporate into the house. High on her list was a big bathroom in their first floor master bedroom. "I'm a tub person," she laughs, "and so many of my friends have big tubs that they don't even use! I thought it was such a waste." So the Fillars' master bathroom has a large soaking tub with a separate shower. The shower's river rock flooring and vertical glass tile pattern in shades of blue and gray give the distinct impression of a waterfall.

Another area that Valerie felt strongly about was the kitchen, and the resulting room is one of her favorite parts of her new home. She wanted



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a big island, so they designed the biggest they could build with just one sheet of quartz. They chose two colors of paint, classic white and platinum gray, for the cupboards, and two types of tile.

The flooring through the kitchen, living room and dining room is an eye-popping, dark, hand-scraped hickory.

And speaking of popping, that's what nails sometimes do in a new house, and that's another thing that Valerie Fillar especially appreciated about working with Todd Roberts. Roberts's firm offers the limited warrantee developed by the Home Builders Association, providing for the subcontractors to return to each project six months and then one year after the house is finished. At those times, they fix things like nail pops and other quirks that occur normally as a new house settles.

Moving through the house, Valerie points to some special features that were built around her family's life style:

- A mudroom allows Kennedy and their daughters, all ardent snow boarders, to shed wet clothing and gear without tracking snow and water through the house.

- A space which was originally designed as a clothes folding counter in the laundry room was quickly repurposed by Valerie and her daughters into a nail station. Polishes, basins and other equipment for full manicures get a lot of use by the female Fillars and their friends.

- As another nod to the women of the family, the house has two tankless water heaters, assuring, says Valerie, that they will never run out of hot water, no matter how many showers get taken.

- For the two-story-tall fieldstone fireplace in the living room, Valerie mentioned that she'd like to find a reclaimed timber to use as a mantle. Carpenter Rob Weatherwax offered an old barn beam he happened to have. Having been sanded, finished and stained, the beam is now a striking addition to the room.

Another of Valerie's favorite parts of the house is the dining room. As she did for design ideas throughout the house, she sought inspiration from the home decorating website, Houzz.com. The result is effective, with distinctive woodwork features and a unique pair of atomic-looking chandeliers. "I fought for those," Valerie laughs, noting that her husband wasn't so sure about the choice, until he saw the result.

Each of the five bedrooms in the house has its own walk-in closet, and oversized linen closets on the second floor



assure that there's a place for everything, says Valerie.

The family has chosen to finish just part of their basement. That section houses not only another bedroom and full bath, but also space for Valerie's jewelry business, Uniquely Creative. (Her work has been featured in Art Hops and is carried by Eve Salon Spa.) The Fillars point out that at some point in the future a new owner could decide to add a home theater in the unfinished part



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of the basement, but that they are more interested in people than they are in home theaters.

It's obvious what attracted Kennedy Fillar and his daughter to the lot they chose. Wooded and overlooking a pond, it comprises about an acre, and Kennedy is doing the landscaping himself. Two decks, one off the kitchen and the other on the lower level, allow the family to enjoy the view and the wildlife, including the birds, squirrels and coyotes, which frequent the area. They chose to construct the deck and railings from composite material, to cut down on maintenance.

The Fillars were pleased with their choice of builder. "Todd responds instantly and puts you in contact with exactly who you need to talk to," they say. "He's constantly connecting people together." Given the short time frame for this project, Valerie often found the house-to-be awash in subcontractors and their teams. Roberts says he has worked with most of his subcontractors for 15 years or more. Both Valerie and her husband were very pleased with all of them.

They're also happy with the homey feel and the accessibility of their new home. "We don't like museum-type homes," Valerie says. "We wanted a place where we could hang out."

In Kennedy Fillar's words, "We wanted to cultivate an environment that fostered togetherness." Their new home has done that already; shortly after they moved in, the family brought on board a high school foreign exchange student from Brazil, who lived with them through the school year. She's gone back to her home country now, so the Fillars are once again open to another long-term guest.

"We're about people," says Valerie Fillar. And their new home gives them every opportunity to be just that.



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# Fire Pits: Far Beyond S'Mores

By Kaye Bennett

More and more, people are moving out – outdoors, that is. From a simple, wood-burning fire pit to elaborate outdoor living rooms with luxurious furniture, and from hot dogs and marshmallows to elegant cocktail parties: Yards are where it's happening, and some kind of fireplace can be an important part of that.

Rhonda Belden, marketing manager of Belden Brick & Supply, attributes this trend to recent economic challenges, which, she says, "... have changed the mindset of people." People are now enjoying more "staycations," (non-travel vacations), and they are doing more entertaining at home, instead of going out. People used to build their homes or do major renovations, then put the outdoor living design on hold for a few years, until they'd saved money for the additional project. But now, Belden observes, more people are planning for the outside spaces in their original design, even if it means adding funding for that to the mortgage they secure. Homeowners recognize that a beautiful and inviting outside space surrounding their home will only add to its value.

Jim Garrison is the owner of Sandstone Creation, in Kalamazoo. Garrison says that, when he gets a call from a homeowner inquiring about an outdoor fire feature, he visits the home, looks at the site, discusses options, then goes to work on a design and cost estimate.

In his design, Garrison says a major consideration is the theme of the landscape. If it's rustic, he'll recommend boulders or stone for the area; for a more refined look, he suggests brick pavers and other elegant materials. Since most of Garrison's projects call for wood-burning fires (gas has its benefits, he acknowledges, but he says, "I personally enjoy setting wood on fire"), he also considers distance from the house and the predominant wind direction.

Garrison offers his customers fire pits custom-built from stone or boulders or, as many people are choosing these days,



*Photo courtesy of Sandstone Creation*

pre-cast kits using concrete blocks and steel insert rings. The burning area is usually three or four feet across, with a surround that's 14 to 16 feet in diameter. For safety's sake, Garrison usually raises the fire circle anywhere from a few inches to a foot off the ground.

Garrison also designs the landscaping around the fire pit, not only creating a cozy, natural feel, but choosing perennials that help repel mosquitoes.

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For people who don't so much like to set wood on fire, modern fire features can be powered by gas, either in the form of a natural gas hook-up or a propane tank. The gas option is what many customers of Bell Tower Outdoor Living Center in Richland are choosing. But it's certainly not a choose-one option only,

says Ashleigh Kosin, owner of Bell Tower, who says that many homeowners equip their yards for both gas and wood outdoor fires.

Kosin says that she's seen a new trend growing in the last year or so: conversation tables around the fire. The availability of gas-powered fire features



gives people more flexibility in furniture and fabric choices, she points out. While flames and sparks from a wood fire can limit the type of fabric you choose for furniture that will be nearby, that's no problem with gas inserts.

Gas fire features themselves are beautiful, with granite and glass surrounds giving a lot of space to set appetizers and drinks, and they can be enhanced with sofas and chairs ("deep seating") in an almost endless choice of fabrics and colors. Kosin says that gas fires have a number of other advantages: "They're as easy to turn on and use as a grill, and there's no fire hazard." She adds that many of the gas fire pits can be set directly on a deck or patio (though check for the weight of the unit), and that they are portable: If you move, you can take it with you.

Controlling the gas flame with a knob, Kosin says, makes it safer than a wood flame, and it's so quick and simple to use that you're likely to use it more often. Its consistent, but not overwhelming heat makes a gas fire a good choice for those slightly chilly Michigan evenings.

Kosin says that her company is seeing a trend toward homeowners wanting to use their outside space like another living room, even more than opting to use it as an extra kitchen. "If people have limited patio space," she says, "they may choose outdoor living over outdoor cooking."

Belden Brick & Supply, based in Grand Rapids, is new to Kalamazoo, with an office that opened in 2014. Rhonda Belden says that the outdoor fireplaces Belden offers are completely customizable, by size, by materials



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and by style. Kits are available so that the homeowner can install the item themselves, though most people, she says, do hire masons and landscapers.

Belden says her company still sells many simple fire rings that insert into a stone surround, but that other products they offer may include a full kitchen, large grill, refrigerator, rotisserie and sink, as well as the fireplace. Also big are pizza ovens: "It's a guy thing," she says.

Belden says her company believes in shopping locally, so they are ready to refer customers to local furniture companies and landscapers to complete the living design around their fire pits.

The experts agree: Southwest Michigan is a great place to live, both indoors and out, and a fire only adds to the fun.



Photo courtesy of Belden Brick & Supply

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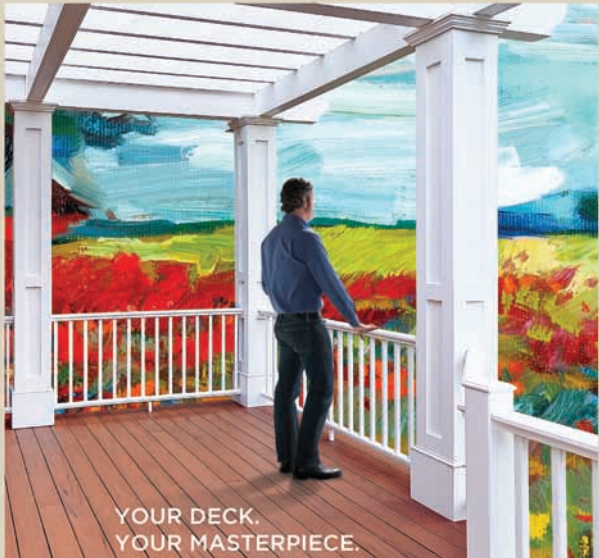


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# Rallying Behind Stair Rails

By Zolton Cohen

**B**uilding code regulations that deal with stairway handrails and balusters are specific and exacting. They are that way because stairways are one of the prime areas in a home where residents can stumble, trip and fall. As well, children must be protected from inserting their heads and appendages between balusters and causing injury to themselves.

But outside of the strictures that make stairways safe, there is opportunity for expression; for beauty; for warmth or architectural statement. Rail and baluster systems constitute a canvas on which a homeowner can paint the theme of the décor; contemporary, traditional, or an eclectic mix.

## CHANGING TASTES

Tom Broekema, of Portage Building Components, says, "Right now there seems to be a trend away from traditional 'over the top' stair rails, where the rail extends over the newel post and curves around at the bottom of the staircase. Most of what we sell these days is a plain, square wood newel post along with plain square or metal balusters. It has gone from the turned, over-the-post system to post-to-post systems with a square, almost Craftsman-style newel post and balusters."

Broekema says that complexity and expense are driving forces in the current stairway market. "Customer preference is still the most important factor, and some are still going with a more elaborate system. But traditional

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*Photo courtesy of Custom Steel Designs*



*Photo courtesy of American Village Builders and Portage Building Components*

rail and baluster systems take longer to install and the parts are more expensive for the fittings over the post, so that plays into the decision-making."

Because of regulations that dictate the 'graspability' of rails, their shape can't stray far from what Broekema calls the "bread loaf" style that has been the norm for more than a hundred

years. But within those guidelines individual taste can be expressed by selecting different wood species, and choosing whether to paint or stain the rail.

He says, "The most popular rail materials at present are probably maple and oak, depending on what is going on with the floor. But oak is a little on the down side these days. Poplar is coming on strong of late because it can be stained to match anything. By putting a little bit of color to it, it can be made to look like cherry. You can make it look like a more expensive wood for less money."

"We have mills that can run any type of wood. The next most common material we see is hickory. It is tough and durable and has a lot of character. It's not a prestige wood like cherry. But, especially using it with box newels, it makes for more of a rustic look. Many people are mixing and matching with a stained handrail and painted balusters, either in wood or metal."

## EVOLVING BALUSTERS

Although handrail design has largely remained unchanged, baluster systems have evolved over time. Some new homes, in fact, do away with individual balusters entirely, substituting glass panels instead. Scott Miracle, from J&J Paint and Glass, thinks the appeal of a glass balustrade is that there are no distractions to the view outside the house. "If you have a view of the lake or golf course," he says, "you want to be able to enjoy that view."

J&J, Miracle says, usually installs quarter-inch thick tempered glass in systems that include a rail on the top and bottom. But they also supply half-inch thick glass for systems that have less support. Glass allows more light into the house, he says, for instance in a situation where there is an upper level

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balcony or walkway, because it is not being blocked by balusters.

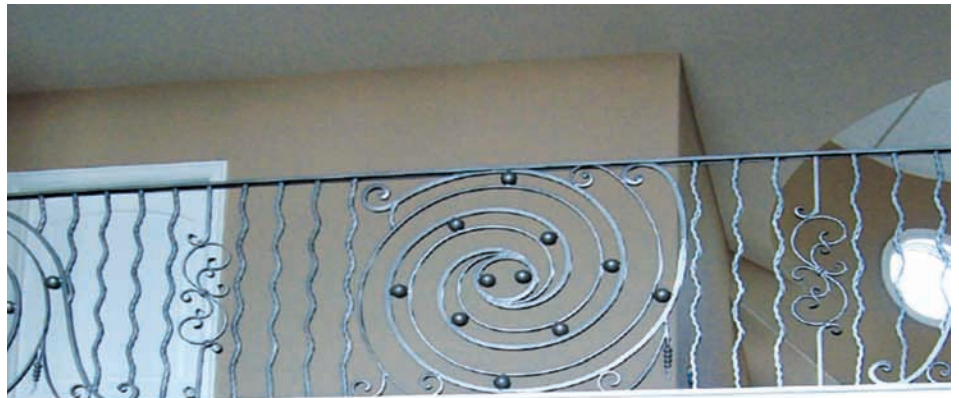
"Another advantage is that the glass can be custom cut to the exact size needed," Miracle says. "And designs that can accommodate any type of art can be sand-blasted into the glass. For an especially striking look, LED lights can be embedded in the rail, so light shines out through the design. And the lights can be programmed to can change colors on a rotating basis."

#### STEEL YOURSELF

For homes with limited floor area, Dave Bontrager's company, Custom Steel Designs, located in Shipshewana, Indiana, can fabricate a spiral staircase to fit any opening or floor height. CSD also builds steel or aluminum frames to fit any size rail system needed, inside or outside the home. And the interior of the frames, Bontrager says, can be filled with either horizontal stainless steel cables or glass panels that act as the balustrade.

"We have an in-house facility that can powder coat both aluminum and steel," he says. "It creates a harder, more durable surface than paint. The finish is baked on at 420 degrees and the product carries a two year warranty."

"Our in-house manufacturing is more of a custom process rather than modifying an already-manufactured piece," Bontrager says. "We also work



*Photo courtesy of Custom Steel Designs*

with wrought iron, and can create contemporary as well as traditional designs."

One final question: What do homeowners do if they have young children who are prone to leaving handprints on glass panels on a staircase? Scott Miracle says, "It's not something a

homeowner should avoid. But they might have to do a little more cleaning from time to time. On the other hand, it is a permanent system and doesn't need maintenance - like painting..."



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