

4D REAL ESTATE

A&E 1D

Prep for spike in building material

Blame it on hurricanes

By David Bradley
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were a twin blow to consumers and builders heading into fall projects. Numerous reports forecast steep price hikes for building materials as a result.

Gulf Coast residents have few options but to pony up for pricier lumber and other assorted products for a reconstruction process that will drag on well into 2006.

Even homeowners hundreds or thousands of miles removed from harm's way will need to make what is largely a financial decision: Do we plow ahead with renovations or sit tight and wait for prices to drop and supplies to increase?

Tough call. And it's tougher still for homeowners caught in mid-project. Your budget may be blown out of the water and if your locale isn't high on the priority list for materials that are instead diverted toward much-in-need Southern markets, you might kiss your completion schedule goodbye, too.

Homeowners will want to broaden their search for materials across multiple communities. Home store Web sites typically list store addresses and contact numbers. You may be forced to work the phones to locate adequate supplies of plywood, oriented strand board, drywall or other lumber products.

You might step up your procurement schedule for items slated for use later in your project. This includes plumbing hardware, counters, flooring, and fixtures. Such look-ahead thinking will be important if you involve subcontractor specialists. Indeed, some of the product pressure may fall on contractor shoulders. Contractors usually patronize a select number of outlets where they have a line of credit or the staff knows their needs. You may need to talk about secondary outlets for some products.

For particularly hard-to-get products, the homeowner-contractor conversation may become quite candid on material substitutions.

When it comes to costs, once prices rise, at least part of the increases tend to stay in place. To what degree the spikes in cost stay elevated is anyone's guess. If you can delay a project, chances are product prices may drop somewhat during the construction off-season as manufacturers gear up for building to come. This means make your purchases before homebuilding starts in earnest in the spring of '06.

Homeowners who involve contractors in remodeling or renovations may also want to stick up for themselves when it comes to product buys usually left for contractors. Rather than allow contractors to buy significant quantities of materials - on which they build in a margin - homeowners should make those buys and avoid the contractor surcharge.

Material prices are a supply-and-demand reality caused by large, horrific storms. Homeowners will need to rely on their own pluck, persistence and sense of timing to grab the best available materials at the best prices.

Looking up for light versatility



PHOTO/ARA CONTENT

Modern skylights offer dependability, location options and health benefits

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When you think of skylights you may picture them as unattractive, inefficient, fading plastic bubbles that leak. If so, you're probably thinking, to paraphrase an old auto commercial, of "your father's skylights."

According to Joe Patrick, product manager with Velux America, today's skylights, properly installed, don't leak. "Matched flashing systems and other improvements have done away with the number one fear of people who are considering cutting a hole in a perfectly good roof," Patrick says.

And where are skylights most used? Traditionally in bathrooms and kitchens. According to an American Standard survey, American homeowners say if they had a choice of accessories for the ultimate dream bathroom, the number one option would be a skylight to bathe the room with more natural light. Add the privacy factor of light from above, plus the additional ventilation available with skylights, and you've upgraded one of the most-used rooms in the home.

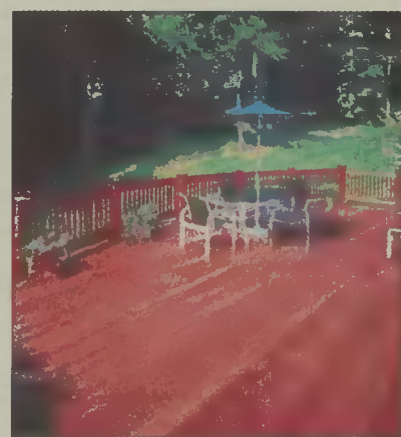
Aside from the aesthetic benefits of natural light, there are health related considerations. Studies show that 20 percent of our population

suffers varying degrees of Seasonal Affective disorder (SAD). Individuals with SAD may experience depression, lower energy, an increased appetite, and a need for more sleep. SAD is directly linked to insufficient daylight. And there are other light-related health considerations. Are there older adults in your home?

Researchers McFarland and Fisher report that to accommodate the adaptation of the aging eye, the amount of light required for visual acuity doubles for each 13 years after the age of 20. More natural light equals better sight. Or, perhaps you have youngsters at home. Students perform significantly better in environments that are lit with natural rather than artificial light.

A study directed by Heshong Mahone Group in California tracked test scores for 21,000 students in California, Colorado and Washington and found that learning rates were 26 percent higher in reading and 20 percent higher in math in rooms with the most natural light. Low-E energy-efficient glass in modern units is durable, reduces external noises, and won't discolor as did older plastic bubble skylights. And skylights no longer just sit there.

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Tips to take deck from autumn drab to fall fab

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Spring may be the time for renewal but when it comes to your backyard deck a pinch of care, a dash of improvements and a touch of TLC is just the right recipe for taking your deck from "Autumn Drab" to "Fall Fab."

"Most people think spring or early summer are the only seasons to spruce up the deck, but fall is an ideal time to get things done before the worst of weather hits," explains Terry Guest, marketing manager from Weyerhaeuser. "Best of all - deck dwellers in warmer climates can immediately enjoy any 'beautifying' improvements a few extra months, while the rest of us get a jump-start on next year's decking season."

Taking the time to complete those easy-to-procrastinate repairs, much-needed upgrades and backyard brightening projects ensures your deck remains a favorite spot for the entire family. When developing a checklist of things to accomplish or create this fall, consider the following ideas and tips for keeping your backyard deck beautiful.

Simple repairs and quick fixes

Occasionally, you may need to address structural repairs like replacing a damaged board or re-nailing loose boards. Fixing these items in autumn provides better protection against additional damages over the winter months, like warping or cracking. Also, cleaning your deck is a critical part of the entire deck care process.

Aesthetically, cleaning can make a dramatic visual improvement by removing years of built-up dirt on surfaces that have weathered due to the elements, mold and mildew, and worn-out finishes. And be certain to sweep away all leaves, needles and branches from your deck and remove all debris from between deck boards. Dirt and leaves can build up, preventing rain or other moisture from draining. Proper ventilation is crucial to avoid moisture build up - standing water is your

Please see TIPS/5D

Design a home gym

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Once upon a time, the term "home gym" meant a treadmill taking up valuable space in your bedroom. But times have changed, and more and more homes now boast state-of-the-art home gyms that include a variety of equipment you might expect to find at your local fitness center.

And while people are investing in the latest exercise machines, such as elliptical trainers and weight lifting systems, they're also devoting more thought to the design and decorating of their gym space. After all, it's easier to motivate yourself to head to the home gym if it's nicely decorated, well-lit and attractive. Here are some tips for putting together a home gym that will give you a good workout and that you'll actually use:

- Choose an appropriate spot in your house for the workout room. Do you have a spare bedroom, or a guest room that doesn't get much use? If that's not an option, how about claiming a section of the family room, den or office? And, there's always the basement. If that's your only choice, there are ways to make it more inviting.
- Think about both your fitness goals and your workout personality. If you want to bulk up, for example, you'll want to include free weights in your plan. If you know that you prefer yoga to running on a treadmill, plan your room accordingly.
- Buy the best equipment you can afford. If the equipment malfunctions frequently or just doesn't give you a good workout, you'll get frustrated and stop using it.

(Why) not your mother's wallpaper

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One of the more exciting trends today in interior design is mid 20 century modern, but, retro with a twist. Modification of this motif is necessary because today's new homes are, according to The National Association of Homebuilders, more than twice as large as they were in the 1950s, and 50 percent larger than they were in the 1970s.

Modern houses call for open floor plans with the spaces flowing into one another, instead of having smaller, separate rooms. The standard eight-foot ceiling has been raised to nine, ten, often, twelve feet. This is true even in the "traditional" style home that most buyers prefer. Kitchens are open to family rooms or breakfast rooms or homework/computer areas. Bedrooms flow to sitting areas



PHOTO/ARA CONTENT

or dressing rooms, even mini breakfast bars. Bathrooms may have his and her compartments, dressing or exercise areas. The homeowner is left

in a quandary as to how to decorate these spaces.

Can the spaces be unified,

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