

3D

REAL ESTATE

A&E 1D

ROLAND
HAWKINSMortgage
process

It's a good idea to get a reasonable understanding of the mortgage loan process prior to searching for a home.

Education is so important that several mortgage programs now require potential homebuyers to complete a course prior to loan approval.

The mortgage loan process is broken down into four stages. The first is completion of the initial application. This is when lenders gather the necessary underwriting information required to determine a borrower's loan worthiness. Mortgage applications can be taken in person, over the Internet or via telephone.

During this preliminary stage a borrower may be able to obtain a pre-qualification letter. This letter simply states that an applicant is qualified for a mortgage based on his or her credit profile and the completed application.

In addition to having a reasonably good credit profile, most lenders will evaluate a borrower's debts-to-loan ratios in their loan determination. Most lenders use the standard 28/41 percent debts-to-income ratios.

Many home loan programs do not accept borrowers when the applicant's monthly mortgage payment exceeds 28 percent of his or her monthly gross income. This is sometimes called the first ratio. A monthly mortgage payment usually includes the property taxes, insurance, principal and interest. If applicable, this first ratio may also include a small monthly payment for the Mortgage Insurance Premium (MIP) or Private Mortgage Insurance (PMI) fee.

In order to get final loan approval, a mortgage applicant must pass the second ratio test as well. Most lenders will not consider mortgage requests when the applicant's total monthly debts-to-income ratios exceed 41 percent of their monthly gross income. Both the first and second ratios need to be less than 41 percent to qualify for most mortgage programs. As an example, a person with a monthly gross income of \$3,000 would qualify for a maximum (28 percent) loan amount/mortgage payment of \$840. Using the same income, the total maximum monthly consumer debts cannot exceed \$1,230 (41 percent of income). This maximum is comprised of the borrower's projected monthly mortgage payment and total consumer debts.

The second phase of the mortgage process is called the loan underwriting stage. During this stage, lenders will normally verify the information submitted. Based on the information submitted, an underwriter will decide if a loan request is acceptable. Underwriters can also recommend certain terms and conditions to grant loan approval. Your credit profile will have a significant impact on how much of a down payment is required to grant loan approval. Credit scores have a strong influence on what terms, interest rates and conditions for which a loan program will be approved.

The third phase in the mortgage process is called loan commitment. After all the underwriting requirements are met and reviewed, a lender is now prepared to either decline or commit to a loan.

ROLAND K. HAWKINS is a Real Estate Agent with Coldwell Banker United Realtors. He can be reached at (704) 840-5762 or www.rolandhawkins.com.

SUNSHADES

Naturally made for the shade



PHOTO/ARA CONTENT

ARTICLE RESOURCE ASSOCIATION

Creating outdoor living spaces has been one of the hottest home improvement trends these past few years. Turning the deck into an outdoor space with all the sophistication, look and feel of the room inside provides the necessary sanctuary when escaping to the comforts of the backyard. However a new twist on this popular trend not only has people moving outwards, but upwards too. As temperatures rise, glare and heat can deter backyard worshippers inside on summer afternoons. For that reason, many are incorporating Western Red Cedar sun-filtering structures atop outdoor living

spaces. These "sunshades" let you enjoy the outdoors on even the warmest days, while providing protection from harmful UV rays. Sunshade areas provide an ideal blend of shade and light — perfect as a retreat or a shady spot to cool off before going inside. Before incorporating a sunshade atop your outdoor living space, be sure to consider the following for maximum enjoyability.

Size and layout matters

Sunshades normally connect with the house directly to provide maximum coverage and protection, but your outdoor living space may present a situation best served by a freestanding overhead sunshade.

Therefore, take special care when deciding the layout specifics and proportions of foundational posts or overhead rafters.

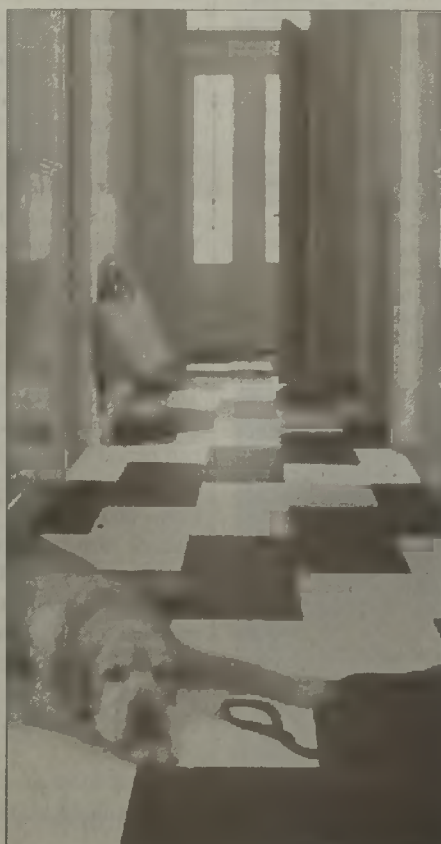
For instance, a set of 4-by-4 inch foundation posts would mesh nicely with 2-by-6-inch overhead boards and 2-by-2-inch cross-sectional slats. Also, one of the greatest appeals of a sunshade is its cohesiveness with the outdoor living space itself — so make sure the sizing is appropriate and things are vertically straight and even in height. You should also ensure the overhead canopy boards are level and evenly spaced in parallel to each other — attention to detail is

essential here as a top-heavy design could affect the "balance" of your space.

Decorative design

Consider adding decorative touches to all canopy board ends. To create a decorative end, perfect your design on construction paper then use it as a template to transfer your design to each board end. Be systematic and symmetric in applying this decorative design to each canopy board. The possibilities are endless here, but choosing decorative flair to complement the architectural feel of your house while matching the deck railing design

Please see **NATURALLY/4D**



PHOTO/ARA CONTENT

Liven up
kitchen,
bath with
flooring

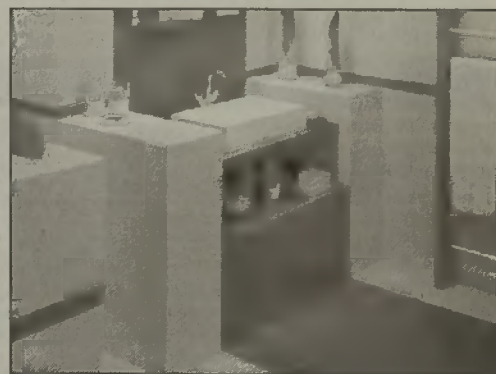
ARTICLE RESOURCE ASSOCIATION

The next time you get the urge to update the look in your kitchen or bathroom, you don't have to start pricing out cabinets and fixtures. There's a new design trend sweeping the nation. These days more and more people are setting the stage for a new look by replacing their flooring.

Floor Covering Weekly, an industry magazine that tracks trends in the flooring industry, lists tile, hardwood and vinyl as the most popular surfaces out there, but goes on to say that the interest in specialty flooring, which is both stylish and comfortable is growing. Sales of natural flooring surfaces in particular, which include bamboo, cork and Marmoleum, are booming.

What makes them so popular? Being environmentally friendly,

Please see **LIVEN/4D**



PHOTO/ARA CONTENT

'Saddle chic' ceramic
tile refines the rustic

ARTICLE RESOURCE ASSOCIATION

The new western inspired look, coined "Saddle Chic," is rustic, yet refined. It's down to earth. Bring the look into your home with willow furniture, stone, copper and wrought iron. Combine exposed woods such as pine, walnut, oak and cedar in natural or distressed finishes with cotton and corduroy to give a cozy feel.

Earth tones such as terra cotta, deep purple, green and brown enhance the warmth and feel of natural materials. Try just a touch of the "Saddle Chic" or do an entire room — even the bathroom. Since the natural material may not be the best solution in this case, you can achieve the look by using ceramic tile from Spain. Ceramic tile offers a

Please see **SADDLE/4D**